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## A Bad Lot.\*

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"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XIII.

"I AM GOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOU."

THE following afternoon, rather to her surprise, Nell found that Cecil was waiting for her at Liverpool Street Station, in order to see her off by the three o'clock train. She knew that he was very busy, and that it must have given him some thought and trouble to accomplish this, and she felt that she ought to be duly gratified by the attention ; yet, somehow, she was scarcely glad to see him.

When he had looked after her luggage and taken a place for her in the train, had secured her a foot-warmer, and bought every newspaper and magazine that he could find for her amusement during her solitary journey, there still wanted some six or eight minutes to the hour, during which they walked up and down the platform together.

Cecil was in good spirits and very affectionate in his manner. Nell was *distracted* and somewhat apathetic. The conversation of the previous evening, which had produced in him a sense of elation and of satisfaction, had left her sore and unresponsive towards him, whilst his words and questionings, that had been so immediately followed by that half-glimpse of a face that had gone by in the darkness, had depressed and subdued her with a sense of impending calamity.

"By the way, Nell," Cecil was saying to her, and they were the first words he had spoken that had aroused any interest in her, "I never told you what an impression you made the other night on my friend Temple. He was quite enthusiastic about you."

"Did he talk about me to you, then?" she inquired a little quickly, feeling all at once that men were hateful, every one of them! and that she detested them all.

"Oh yes, I should rather think he did! And let me tell you, Nell, that is a very great compliment from old Julian, for he is the most inveterate woman-hater and the most determined old bachelor that I ever met. He cares for nothing but his sport and his books. He never takes the slightest notice of any woman, and he looks upon love and marriage as positive misfortunes to mankind."

"I ought, then, I suppose, to be very much flattered by his approval of me," remarked Nell coldly.

"Well, it certainly shows that he was really impressed by you, and I was naturally pleased at his telling me how much he admired you; it is your conversation which seems to have especially delighted him."

Nell made no answer, and Cecil cried out immediately:

"Talk of the old gentleman! Why, if there is not Julian Temple himself! He must be going by this train. Hullo, Julian, old man, where are you off to?"

Mr. Temple, who wore a rough travelling ulster, a pot hat, and carried a gun-case in his hand, stopped and returned his friend's greeting, taking off his hat to Nell, who bowed to him so very distantly that for a moment he thought she did not recognize him.

"I am going down to a place called Dinely, just beyond Fenchester, for some shooting," he said, in answer to Cecil's question. "Are you going to the same part of the world?"

"No, I am not; but Miss Forrester is going home by this train. Marshlands is the last station before you get to Fenchester. You might look after her for me, Julian, as she is travelling alone."

Temple bowed. "Delighted, I am sure; if there is anything I can do for Miss Forrester I hope she will command me. But I will not inflict myself upon you by the way, Miss Forrester, for, as you see, I am smoking."

"Now isn't that just like old Temple?" cried Cecil, laughing, as his friend walked away in the wake of a porter, who came to

relieve him of his gun-case. "I told you he was a woman-hater! I believe he would rather perish than be bottled up alone in a railway carriage for two hours with a woman. Even you, Nell, are not sufficiently attractive to him for that. But come, you ought to be taking your place; time is just up."

The parting words between them were necessarily brief and hurried, and a few minutes later the train was steaming slowly out of the station.

Nell sat by herself in her corner, surrounded by the literature which Cecil had provided for her entertainment. She did not look at it. The newspapers and magazines lay unheeded beside her.

Her eyes were fixed vacantly out of the window upon the swiftly shifting scene. The crowded eastern district, with its countless rows of mean and squalid houses, with the factory chimneys rising up gaunt and tall amongst them; the long line of ships' masts, stretching away like a leafless avenue towards the horizon, along the course of the invisible river; then those wide, desolate spaces—unlovely and repulsive wastes, that cling to the outskirts of a great city, set round with blackened fields and stunted shrubs; then, by-and-by, neat suburban villas, each in its trim garden; then more fields—broad green meadows these, interspersed with lanes and woods and streams, with farms and nestling villages amongst them, and here and there an ivy-covered tower or pointed spire; till at last London and its filthy slums and its trim suburbs is left altogether behind, and the wide, sweet-scented country opens out on either side.

Nell sat looking at all these things as they flew past her, with eyes that saw none of them. Her own thoughts engrossed her so completely that she was blind to all outward things.

Her whole mind was filled with one thing, one individual; she could think of nothing else. It was not Cecil Roscoe, her lover, whose farewell words might still have been ringing in her ears, who thus absorbed Nell Forrester's thoughts. Neither was it that other dark figure, who had flashed back again out of the shadows of the past so unexpectedly and so startlingly last night into living reality.

All night long, indeed, she had lain awake, thinking about Vane Darley. Her mind had worn itself out in vain conjectures as to the whys and wherefores of his reappearance. For many

hours, indeed, she had tried to cheat herself into the belief that she had been mistaken, and that the man that had passed her in the darkness of the park was some stranger, whose chance resemblance to Darley had quickened her pulses into a momentary delusion. But she knew this was not the case; she knew perfectly well that it was Darley himself. His face was thin and aged, and he looked ill, but it was Darley all the same. He had not changed so much as to leave her in any real doubt about his identity. The bare fact of his having returned to England and of her having seen him was sufficiently disturbing to her peace of mind. To meet him again, just now, was the very last desire of her heart. She wanted to cover up and forget that past chapter of her life, to deny it altogether if necessary, not to have it thus forcibly brought back to her in all its undying intensity.

Towards morning she had fallen into an uneasy slumber, and with daylight, as is so often the case after a sleepless night of anxieties, that are apt to assume exaggerated proportions in our minds during the hours of darkness, things presented themselves to her in a somewhat less formidable aspect. For if she had seen and recognized Colonel Darley, she was, at any rate, perfectly convinced that he had not seen her. Even had he seen her, she felt certain that passing her thus, in the darkness, it would have been impossible for him to have recognized her. She had grown out of all knowledge. She had changed from a lanky, half-fledged girl into a tall and fully-developed woman. Moreover, it seemed to her highly improbable that he would even remember her now. That which was so dire and terrible a memory to her, was no doubt to him, only one out of the many insignificant nothings upon the troubled stream of a dark and stormy life. She resolved to tell no one, not even her grandmother, that she had seen him, and she told herself that, in all human probability, she would never come across him any more. It was not Vane Darley who troubled her at this moment.

The man who now filled her whole mind so as to leave room for no other thought or feeling within her was Julian Temple.

An unreasonable anger against him overpowered her. He had talked her over with Cecil! discussed her looks, probably—praised her intelligence—and made merry with him, no doubt, over the conversation they had had together. And she, who had rashly opened out her innermost heart and soul to this man, who had



talked to him freely of those vague dreams and fancies which she had never put into words before, who had believed herself to have been understood, and that she had in return been the recipient of his most sacred confidences! And all the time he had only been drawing her on, turning her inside out, as it were, in order to "damn her with faint praise" to Cecil; and, no doubt, to turn her into ridicule afterwards to other people!

She remembered that it was what Miss Vincent had said of him—that he was false and dangerous, a man to be dreaded and avoided.

"I hate him!" said Nell aloud to herself in the solitude of her carriage. "How I hate him!"

The tears stood in her eyes as she spoke the words, and yet assuredly they were not all tears of hatred and of anger. There must have been something else, some other feeling more subtle still, down in the very depths of her heart to have disturbed her so much. She thought of him now, travelling eastwards in the same train as herself—alone, perhaps, too, as she was alone.

Why had he refused to travel down with her? Why had he put this needless and humiliating slight upon her? Was it not that he despised her; that, in spite of his pretended admiration and interest in her, he did not apparently consider her society worth his while to seek? She recollected that he had not spoken to her again that evening at Mrs. Roscoe's; he had not even wished her good-night; he had gone away hurriedly soon after the gentlemen had come upstairs, without throwing so much as a look in her direction.

And then the tears that were filling her eyes rolled slowly over and dropped, one by one, down upon her hands.

"There is something unlucky about me," she thought sadly; 'there is a fatality against me! Well, I have always got Cecil; I suppose I ought to be satisfied, for he is kind and good. I wonder why I begin to find him so tedious and so irritating? I must be very ungrateful, for he is staunch and true; although I suppose his mother detests his engagement, and he himself disapproves of me, so there can be very little inducement to him to stick to me. I wonder whether I shall have got sick to death of him between this and Easter!"

And then she took up *The World* and tried to become interested in it. But November afternoons are short, and very soon

the greyness of dusk began to steal over the wintery landscape, through which the express train rushed ceaselessly on. There was a heavy, lowering sky, but no rain ; only the wind rose sullenly and swept in long melancholy gusts over the world. It was the sort of evening that warned one that there would be storms at sea to-night. The riven clouds parted now and then into ragged, tattered spaces, through which a pale sky gleamed with momentary flashes of light, and then, once more, they banked themselves up into dark and frowning masses.

Nell could not see to read any longer, she leant back in her corner and strained her eyes for some time, peering out into the ever-increasing darkness. Then, because she had slept so badly last night, and because she was worn out and wearied by conflicting and harassing thoughts, her eyes insensibly closed. The rhythmical noises of the swift-rushing train began to mingle with her thoughts, and the thoughts themselves grew blurred and indistinct, the even throbbing sounds mixing themselves up strangely and harmoniously into fragmentary, half-conscious dreams, until, at last, even these ceased altogether—and Nell fell soundly asleep.

For a long time there was silence, and all the vexed problems of her life were at rest. Then, all at once, she started up wide awake and breathless, with a sudden rush of blood to her head and heart, and with that queer instantaneous conviction of something being wrong that attacks one at the very first breath of returning consciousness. The train had stopped. Yet there were no station lights ; no light at all through the utter darkness without, only a sound of voices—confused shouts and questions—a vague Babel of ever-increasing human consternation that mingled strangely with the moanings of the wind. Nell looked at her watch—in about twenty minutes time she was due at Marshlands. Why, then, was the train at a standstill? There could be no station here within five or six miles. She began to be frightened, and let down the glass and leant out. What she saw was not calculated to reassure her ; heads were leaning out of every carriage window ; a few passengers had alighted, and all were shouting questions to the guard, or exchanging apprehensive remarks to each other. The guard ran rapidly past her carriage.

"What is the matter? why are we stopping?" she cried out with the rest.

He did not answer her, but only ran on the faster, the bull's-eye lantern that swung in his hand flashing a fluttering light into the darkness as he hurried by.

At that moment a face that she knew looked up at her from below the carriage.

"Is that you, Miss Forrester? Don't be frightened."

"Oh, Mr. Temple!"

There was a ring of intense relief in her voice. How glad she was to see him! She forgot all about her anger and her hatred.

"What is the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing with our train; but the signals are against us. As far as I can gather there seems to have been some accident or break down in front of us to a luggage train. I understand the line is not clear; we may be kept, that is all."

Just then the guard came back with the stoker, running hard; as he came he called out some directions at each carriage door and opened it as he passed.

"What does he say?" faltered Nell.

"We are all to get out; there is another train behind us; the stoker is going to run back to the signal box behind to stop it; there is no danger," he added reassuringly, "only he says it will be safer to get out."

"No danger, sir," and the guard echoed his words as he threw open the door of Nell's carriage. "She can't be up for another ten minutes, and he'll be able to get back to the signal box to stop her in plenty of time; but it's best to be on the safe side."

The passengers did not need to be told this twice; everybody scrambled out of the train in double-quick time with as much alacrity as though the expected train were actually in sight.

Temple helped Nell to jump down from the carriage. She was trembling very much, but she did not speak.

"I am afraid you will be cold. You may as well have your cloak," he said, as they were moving on, and he turned back towards the carriage in order to fetch it from the rack, where in her hurry she had forgotten it. For a moment Nell lost her head; she caught him by the arm and tried to draw him back.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't go back! What does it matter about the cloak? Pray, pray, don't go back to the carriage; the other train might come. I entreat you not to go."

He looked at her for half a second with a little surprise. The lights from the train shone full upon her face; he saw that she was white down to her lips and that her eyes were full of terror. There was a note of positive agony in her voice.

He disengaged himself quietly from her clinging hands.

"There is no danger at all. Did you not hear the guard say that there were ten minutes to spare? And you must have your cloak. I shall not be a moment gone. Please stand back a little farther—go off the line by the hedge, you will be out of the crowd there, and I will come back to you immediately."

When he came back to her with the cloak over his arm he found that she was sobbing quietly but almost hysterically. He wrapped the cloak carefully and tenderly around her, and then he drew her arm under his. Her sobs ceased at once and she became perfectly calm.

"There is nothing at all to be frightened at now, everybody is safe, and the man will in all probability be in loads of time to have the other train stopped at the signal. You are not frightened now, are you?"

"Oh, no. Please forgive me for being so stupid," she added shyly.

"It was not stupid; it is perfectly natural that you should be upset. But it is all right; I am with you, and I am going to take care of you."

A sense of safety, of peace and protection, stole over her at his words. Somehow she minded nothing any more now, although they were stumbling over some rough broken ground and she could not see a yard before her, and nearly tumbled on her nose.

"I am going to take you across this stony place into that field," he went on. "I see something that looks like a fallen tree or stump out there, and if you will sit down and wait for a few minutes, I will go and see what I can find out about the chances of our being able to get on."

She raised no objection, and he left her about fifty yards from the line in a field by the side of a straight, narrow dyke, where the root of a fallen pollard willow that slanted across the stream afforded her a seat.

She sat quite still and waited for him. Now that she had her cloak she was not at all cold, although it had not been the cold

that had made her tremble. She felt quite warm now and strangely happy.

And yet the position was not a very cheerful one.

The arrested train lay in front of her like a great shining serpent, the engine snorting forth fire and steam redly against the dark sky, and the long line of lighted windows curving away behind it into the gloom. The passengers were mostly huddled together for companionship and comfort in a little crowd near the guard and the engine driver; a few of them had, like herself, strayed across the railway and the narrow ditch into the fields, and were walking up and down either to keep themselves warm or to curb their impatience.

Presently Temple came back to her.

"I am so sorry—I am sadly afraid that we shall have a long time to wait. A man has just come up from the next station to say the line won't be clear for at least an hour. I am so afraid you will catch cold. You must not, at any rate, sit still." He held out his hand to her and made her rise from her lowly seat.

"Where are we?" asked Nell. "I can hardly see yet, but I ought to know where we are."

"The guard says about six or seven miles from Marshlands—that is your station, is it not? But the luggage train has gone off the rails about three miles off. Miss Forrester, I wonder how it would be if you were to walk home? It has just occurred to me that if you knew your way it would be much better for you than standing shivering here. The luggage, of course, will be taken on to Fenchester in time, and if you are a good walker I believe it would be the best thing to do, for one cannot tell how long it may be before the line is clear."

Nell had turned round. She was shading her eyes with her hands and peering into the darkness behind her. All at once the hurrying clouds parted a little in the west, and a pale and watery moon struggled faintly out for a moment from behind them. Nell caught sight of a familiar object: a little cluster of cottages nestling together in a hollow of the flat country, and a low church tower with a whirling weathercock, that glittered for a moment in the faint moonlight.

"Ah, I know perfectly where I am," she cried. "That is the village of Coldbeach. There must be a road on the other side of this dyke. I know the way very well indeed; it is only about

five miles from here to Marshlands House. I can find my way home easily."

"But can you walk so far?"

"Oh, yes. Fancy asking a country-bred girl if she can walk five miles!" and Nell laughed quite merrily. "I am quite sure, Mr. Temple," she continued, "that it will be much the best thing to do as you say; for it is not only the waiting, but I am afraid my father and sisters might be anxious; they may perhaps hear that there is an accident on the line, and if I don't turn up——"

"Yes, I had thought of that too. That decides it. If you will describe your box to me, I will go and speak to the guard about the luggage."

He went, and very soon returned to her. The moon was struggling out once more, although the wind seemed to be rising.

"If you will just see me across this field into the road, Mr. Temple," said Nell, as he rejoined her, "that is all I shall want. I shall be all right then, and be able to get home perfectly."

"What do you mean?" he said, drawing her hand under his arm and peering down to look at her face under her hat. "You don't suppose that I am going to leave you to walk home by yourself, do you? That would be a curious arrangement, truly! Have I not told you already that I consider you to be under my charge? I am going to take care of you."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### HOW THE "ROMANCE" WAS CONTINUED.

IT was a wild, rough night, yet the moon shone out fitfully from behind the hurrying clouds that racked across the wind-driven sky. In the intervals of light the whole flat country shone like burnished silver, and everything prosaic and homely became softened and poetized under the tender radiance. The ugly little cottages, the pollard willows along the straight dykes, the clusters of farm buildings and hay-stacks, dotted sparsely across the wide plain, were transfigured into loveliness by the enchanting witchery of the white moonlight. Then the moon would withdraw herself again behind the swift rushing clouds, and all would be plunged once more into impenetrable darkness.

It was now past six o'clock, and the wind had risen very much. The willows bent and lashed their boughs to the fury of it; the

scanty grass in the meadows was swept like the surface of a lake by its violence ; far away to the north a windmill flung its gaunt black arms wildly into the air, and Nell Forrester, with bent head and tottering steps, had sometimes hard work to keep her footing, even although she clung to Julian Temple's strong supporting arm.

Eddies of dust—the prelude, perhaps, of rain—spun along the straight white road before them ; and presently out of the dim mystery of the night, a flock of wild duck rose from the oozy marsh hard by, whirling with eerie cries and a loud fluttering of wings close over their heads, ere they vanished quickly into the blackness of the sky.

They had now left the stranded train far behind them ; the twinkling lights of the village of Coldbeach had faded away ; all was wide, and vast, and empty on every side of them ; their solitude was as complete as though they had been in a desert.

For some time they hardly spoke, for it was hard work to breast the boisterous wind, and there seemed a certain physical impossibility of starting anything like coherent conversation. Yet, perhaps, there were other secret influences at work in the heart of each that helped to keep them silent.

"Do you find it very hard work?" said Temple at length, as a fiercer blast seemed to threaten to blow them both away.

"Oh no, I love it!" cried Nell, and the suppressed excitement in her ringing voice made him look at her curiously. The moon at that moment shone full in her face ; he could see that her eyes danced and sparkled, that her parted lips were lines of scarlet, and that there was a flush of crimson roses upon her cheeks.

"Don't you love the wind?" she continued gaily. "I am so used to it. I have been out in it all my life. Nowhere, except, I suppose, on the sea, does the wind blow as it does here across these dear level plains of my native country."

"Yet is a very rough night for a lady to be out in," he demurred.

"It is delicious, and I adore it!" she cried with enthusiasm. "See how the moonshine washes across the world, and how the black clouds hurry along to catch up the light ; and then the rough wind comes roaring after them both. Oh, it is glorious ! Feel how the wonderful invisible thing whirls about us both ! Does it not seem to blow right through one, knocking away by the sheer force of it everything that is base and mean and



cowardly within one? blowing it all clean away out of one's soul and leaving it empty, and swept of all that is evil."

His heart began to beat in sympathy with her thought.

"It is here that the first chapter of my 'romance' must be written; and it is you who are my priestess and my inspiration," he said quickly, losing his head a little as he caught the infection of her mood. "See yonder! There go the 'Risen Souls,' flying with the clouds across the world! Miss Forrester, from where do you get your ideas? they are immense! It seems to me that you must know and understand the sea as well as you do the fens, to love these wild winds so dearly. Have you ever been on a yacht?"

For a moment her heart stood still, and the buoyant exhilaration of her mood changed.

"Once. A long time ago," she answered in a low voice. For the whole world and its kingdoms she could not have given an evasive answer to Julian Temple.

"And you loved it? The waves as well as the winds must have set your pulses dancing?" he asked, longing to draw her out still more.

"Yes, I loved it! I remember how the spray dashed into my face, and how my hair blew long and wide behind me, and how the sails swung and courtesied to the breeze, and the sea-gulls whirled their white wings about the hurrying ship. But," and she seemed to recall herself with an effort from a pursuance of these recollections, "but it was a long time ago, and I was only a child."

Something in her manner set him wondering when it was—whose yacht she had been upon, and where she had sailed.

"It is a pity that you, who love nature so well, should not see more of the world; but perhaps you may travel some day."

"It is not likely—we are poor, you see, and poor people stay at home."

"But when you are married? perhaps you will go abroad with Cecil?"

"Oh—Cecil!" her voice became uninterested. The mention of her betrothed's name brought her thoughts swiftly down again from heaven to earth. "I had forgotten Cecil," she added simply, and almost too truthfully for prudence.

The words set him thinking.

"After all, what does it matter?" he said to himself. "One evening—and then no more of it! Until I stand behind a

white-robed bride at the chancel step, and find myself forced into the rôle of her bridegroom's friend and supporter. After to-night I shall certainly not see her again till her wedding day. What harm can it do her, or me, that we should become friends and talk openly and freely to one another? Besides, I cannot help myself—it is not my doing that we are here alone together in the darkness and the solitude. I did not seek this position; it was forced upon me by fate."

Then she spoke again, and he shook himself rid of yet another thought that flashed into his mind, and that was not over profitable to dwell upon.

"What an odd thing life is!" Nell was saying musingly; and in her words there seemed a faint echo of his own thoughts. "How strange that you and I should be here, alone together in this wild darkness—just you, and I, and the silent world! I feel as though we had been friends for years. And yet, would you believe it, Mr. Temple? an hour ago I hated you, and swore to myself that I would never speak to you again."

"My dear Miss Forrester!" he exclaimed in unfeigned amazement at this astounding confession. "You *hated* me! Great God! what had I done?"

Nell laughed merrily; she was clinging with both hands to his arm, simply in order to steady herself; and her hurrying feet tripped double time to his long footsteps—much as on that other evening long ago she had clung to Vane Darley's arm, and had danced along beside him; for her mood had changed, and she was a child again.

"It sounds horrible, does it not? But it only means that I was foolish and fancied things. I had got it into my head—it was from something Cecil said to me—that you were only laughing at me the other night, and that you repeated to him all we had talked about together. I—I could not have borne it," she added, with a little hot impatience. "If you had done so, I should have been right to hate you, should I not? But I am sure it is not true, and that you did not."

"Certainly I did not," he answered, a little soberly. "Did Cecil say so?"

"Not exactly. Oh, no; he only said that you had spoken about me afterwards to him. It was all my own stupid fancy, I am sure, that you had repeated to him the things we had talked about."

The "we" struck with an inexpressible charm upon his ears, and then he pulled himself together and shivered a little.

"I should never have dreamt of doing so," he answered after a moment, very gravely indeed; and then he was silent for a long time—thinking deeply.

He was puzzled and perplexed. That Cecil did not the least understand or appreciate her had been patent to him from the first. Cecil was very much in love with her—so much was he in love that he had flung to the winds, for her sake, much of his natural prudence and circumspection. He was, indeed, prepared to make what was undoubtedly a very bad and undesirable marriage for the love of her; and yet Julian had been quick enough to perceive that Cecil was merely under the spell of this girl's wonderful personal charm—he was not in the least alive to the especial beauty of her mind. But at least he had supposed that Nell herself must be genuinely fond of her lover; yet now, after what she had just said, he began to doubt even this. Neither, on the other hand, did she seem to him to be the sort of woman who would be likely to marry a man from merely mercenary motives. Besides, Cecil, although fairly well off, was by no means a catch in the matrimonial market. If she did not love and believe in him with all her heart, what in the name of fortune was she going to marry him for?

He argued the question out within his own mind, simply and solely as an independent bystander—or so he told himself. He was the friend of both. Was there nothing that, as a friend, he could do to bring about a deeper sympathy between them?

Meanwhile, Nell was chattering to him lightly and gaily, unconscious of the tempest of contradicting thoughts which she had aroused in him. She was telling him about her sisters: about Dottie and her betting, about Millie and her mania for horses and dogs, and all about the crowd of admirers—Messrs. Popham and Drake and Toulmin—and their nicknames, and of how they kept the house alive by their comings and goings.

"Not that they amuse me at all, Mr. Temple; for, as a matter of fact, I think them all terribly uninteresting."

He listened with a half attention. He was still thinking about Cecil, and wondering why in the world she was going to marry him. A sort of dogged determination was upon him; he was bent upon assuming the attitude of mediator between her

and him. He told himself that he was Cecil's friend, first and foremost, and he forced himself to lead the conversation back to him; and yet all the time he was secretly conscious—with a consciousness that irritated him—that it was not so much in Cecil's interests as because of a burning and altogether reprehensible curiosity to fathom the depths of Nell's heart that he did so.

"Cecil is such a good chap," he observed, breaking in upon her confidences about her family.

"Cecil? Oh, yes, ~~he~~ is." Nothing more.

"I am glad that he is going to be so thoroughly happy; no one deserves it more."

Nell laughed.

"Will he be so thoroughly happy? I thought you looked upon men about to marry as suicidal maniacs, Mr. Temple. Cecil himself told me so. He says you are a woman-hater."

"That is because I am not married myself. An old bachelor is always called a woman-hater."

Nell would have liked to ask him why he did not marry, but she had not the courage, and Julian profited by the moment of silence to drag back Cecil's name by the head and heels—she should not evade the subject like this.

"I hope that you and Cecil will be very happy," he persisted, a little stupidly perhaps.

"Thanks. That is very kind of you. I daresay we shall get along as well as most married couples do."

"Miss Forrester, I cannot bear that strain of cynicism in you. In heaven's name, why, at your age, fresh and unspoilt as you are, with youth, and beauty, and a lover who is devoted to you, why should you speak like a hardened woman of the world who has found out the bitterness and the falseness of life's promises? I cannot understand it in you—cannot reconcile it with what I know of you."

He spoke hotly, from his heart. Cecil and his interests faded once more out of his mind. It was Nell, half child, half woman, with the soul of a poet and with the heart of a cynic, that absorbed him now.

"Why should you suppose me to be what you say—fresh and unspoilt?" she asked in a low voice. "You don't imagine that because I have my dreams and my ideals, I am so foolish as

to believe I can ever realize them? There can be no greater mistake than that. I am young, as you say—I am twenty-one, but at twenty-one a woman is old enough to be disillusioned. Do you suppose I don't know how hard the world is upon girls who have been brought up as I have been? We Forresters have a bad name, Mr. Temple, from Granny downwards—for Granny was a Forrester herself, you know; she and my grandfather were first cousins—and we are all pariahs. No one knows this better than you do. Cecil knows it, too; and so does his mother, who will not be civil to me as long as there is a hope that Cecil may throw me over between this and Easter. And so he would, if it were not that he is in love with me. Oh yes, I will do him that justice; he does love me now very much. It only remains to be seen whether in the long run he does not love his mother and respectability better."

"What you say grieves me very much," said Temple in a low voice of constraint. "I had hoped and believed that you were both so happy; and, indeed, I think that Cecil will be more staunch and faithful than you seem to fear; but you—with these doubts of him—you——?"

"Ah! you think that I ought to be too proud to take a husband on those terms. Well, I am proud—proud enough to feel it, God knows!—but not proud enough, perhaps, to throw away my only chance of passing through the magic doors of that world of yours, Mr. Temple—that world where girls have had careful fathers to stand by them and protect them, and good mothers who have trained, and taught, and watched over them all their lives, so that they have had no chance of learning—things—that I have learnt. How cruel the good people inside those doors are to those who stand outside! And how glad they are to shut them to in their faces if they presume to try and push themselves through! Oh! it is not a kind world at all, that world to which you belong—only, it is better, perhaps, than ours, because if you are once inside you don't get condemned without being tried—'hung without benefit of clergy,' as they say."

"But you care for Cecil? surely you care for him?" he persisted with a feeling of blank dismay.

"I am very fond of Cecil," she answered simply, but without any rapture at all. "If I were not, I should not have said I would marry him, I suppose. But I am not at all fond of Mrs.

Roscoe, or of Mrs. Torrens—neither are they fond of me," she added, with a hard little laugh. "Mr. Temple, I cannot think why I am saying all this to you—you don't think very badly of me, do you?"

She looked up anxiously into his face, that was very grave and overcast; unconsciously she seemed to draw a little nearer to him, and unconsciously, too, he tightened the pressure of his arm a little upon hers.

"Think badly of you? Oh no; how could I do that? My dear little girl, if you only knew how sorry I am for you! I would do anything in the world to help you—you and Cecil; and some day I am sure all these troubles and uncertainties will pass away, and life will be brighter when you begin it afresh as his wife. I understand well that in many ways things must be very difficult to you just now. What you are pleased to call 'my world' is a somewhat conventional place, and its inhabitants do not understand deviations from the beaten tracks; but although I myself am something of an outlaw at heart, as I told you, I think that, for a woman at least, the beaten tracks are safer."

Nell sighed. "Ah! and our tracks at Marshlands are anything but 'beaten'!—as you would say if you were to see us Forresters at home. What Cecil must have suffered passes my comprehension now that I have beheld him at the other extremity of the Pole. There is Marshlands in front of us, Mr. Temple," she added, pointing to where a long, low house, with lights in some of its lower windows, loomed darkly out of the gloom in front of them.

During the last two miles the country had become less bleak and bare; a few low-lying woods broke the monotony of the plain, and they had crossed the river Laze, winding through the meadows in serpentine coils that gleamed like silver under the moonlight.

"You will come in, will you not, Mr. Temple?" said Nell, as they neared the dilapidated gates and the empty and deserted lodge. "We are a queer rough lot, but my father would like to thank you, I know, for bringing me home."

"No, thank you, Miss Forrester. I must hurry on to Fenchester, I think; I ought to send a telegram from there to my friends at Dinely. I will wish you good-bye at your own gates."

Somehow there fell a sudden chill upon them both—the word “good-bye” struck drearily upon their ears.

They reached the gates and he stood still. Nell suddenly put out both her hands to him.

“You—you will not go away without seeing me again?—you will come over on Sunday?” she said with an odd little break in her voice.

He took the hands she reached out to him and held them fast and looked fixedly into her face. Once more it had grown pale with some inward intensity which he did not understand, or which, perhaps, he did not dare to analyze—for there was the same look in her eyes as when she had tried to stop his going back to the train.

“Will Cecil be down for Sunday?” he asked hesitatingly.

“No—he is not coming this week.”

“Then——”

“Oh! why need that make any difference?” she cried impatiently. “Pray come. Is it not natural that you should? You are his greatest friend.”

“It is for that reason,” he said, in so low a whisper that she hardly caught the words. “Do you think I ought to come, Nell?”—her name slipped out almost without his knowledge—“do you wish it so much?” he added a little lamely, seeking man-like to shift the responsibility off his own shoulders on to hers. “If you wish it very much, then I will,” he added, with that inborn weakness which was wont to assail him just when he ought to have been strong.

“Yes—come,” she answered in a whisper, that had something in its gentle softness that was almost a caress.

And perhaps at that moment, as each turned from the other silently and in the darkness, there was no longer any sort of delusion in either of their hearts as to the meaning of it.

## CHAPTER XV.

### MRS. HARTWOOD AGAIN.

IN the dining-room of a shabby house in Upper Warbrook Place, Bloomsbury, a widow lady in spectacles sat stooping over a table that was drawn closely into the old-fashioned bow window. The light of the November morning was pale and



uncertain, and the lady's occupation was elaborately fine, and exceedingly trying to the eyes. She was painting flowers and figures on a curved piece of black satin that was destined to be mounted as a fan.

The design, which to the fashionable West End firm who gave her regular employment, she passed off as her own, was in reality purchased by her for a very few pence from a consumptive lad who lay dying on his bed in a miserable attic at the top of the house; and who for two years past had supplied her regularly with the patterns from which she copied her work.

She was wondering now, as she worked her brush patiently and laboriously, what she should do when Allan Salter died, as he must do, the doctor said, before many months were over.

It was owing to the extreme grace and originality of the designs, even more than to the fineness of the execution, that Messrs. Langworthy and Groves had kept Mrs. Hartwood in regular and well-paid employment for so long. She was in the habit of taking Allan Salter's pictures to the shop every week in order to submit them to the foreman—an educated man of very artistic tastes, who imagined that he had discovered a genius in the fan painter. Once when Allan had been too ill to paint them for her, Mrs. Hartwood had been reduced to taking some old designs of her own: an Italian landscape, surrounded with woolly roses, which she had found very popular with the young ladies to whom at divers times she had given private lessons; also a certain shepherdess, with sheep in the background, a relic of her own pre-marital days. But these lovely creations had been rejected with scorn.

"Not up to your usual form at all this week," had said the artistic gentleman who sat in judgment upon her work, closing up the portfolio and returning it to her promptly. "You must keep better up to the mark than this; these are very wishy-washy and old-fashioned—not at all what we require. Please bring me something more striking and original next week; these things are no use to us at all. You can do much better than that if you try."

And until Allan Salter was well enough to work again, Mrs. Hartwood had not been able to obtain any further orders from that eminent firm of fan-makers.

She could not think what she should do when the consumptive.

boy should be dead. She paid him so little—only a shilling for three of his pictures. Even if she were to find any one else who could draw and invent as well, who was there who would not understand the value of such work better than to do them for the money?

The design she was at work upon now, represented a battle between demons and skeletons—the demons were scarlet and the skeletons were white and weirdly grotesque. Mrs. Hartwood disapproved of the subject extremely, she considered it profane and irreligious; but Allan told her that it was a dream he had had, and the artistic foreman had considered it very striking and spirited and especially suitable to the season of Christmas, which was now approaching—a remark which filled the clergyman's widow with secret horror. But necessity knows no prejudices, and, in spite of her objections to the subject, Mrs. Hartwood was filling in her prancing devils and grinning skeletons in body colour with much accuracy and precision of touch.

"If my poor dear John could see me sitting here painting these dreadful creatures he would turn in his grave with horror!" she thought, as she laid down her brush and took off her spectacles for one moment to rest her tired eyes.

"And what am I to do when I can't get the designs any more? Oh, what hard work it is for a poor lady to make her living! A whole fortnight of toil to earn five or six pounds! And what a little way it goes when I have got it! I wish I could see my way to make money more quickly and easily. My back aches and my eyes ache—and how sick and tired I am of painting from morning till night!" At this moment a brougham drew up at the door, and a well-dressed young lady got out of it and ran nimbly up the steps of the house.

"Miss Vincent! I wonder what she wants. I have not seen her for a long time; perhaps she has come to ask me to give her some more lessons; they paid me well, those lessons, two a week at a guinea an hour. Or perhaps she wants to buy some more of Allan Salter's old designs. I let her have the last much too cheap; these rich people are so mean, they always try to beat down those who are poor and to get big gains out of them. Ah, my dear Miss Vincent, this is indeed a pleasure!" as the dirty-faced maid-of-all-work admitted the visitor into the dingy room. "What a long while it is since I have seen you

How is your dear mamma? How kind of you to pay me a visit."

"I was driving by and I thought I must run in and see you for a moment, dear Mrs. Hartwood. I see you are as busy as ever. Oh! what a queer funny picture you are painting now; how wonderfully clever you are to draw these things. And this one—how graceful it is," taking up another design that lay upon the table, "Gold-fish chasing Water Babies;" "it really is charming. Dear Mrs. Hartwood, what talent you have; you must be making your fortune!"

"Alas, no, dear Miss Vincent; I work very hard and I make very little. Talent is of very little use now-a-days. All markets are so overstocked, and the pushing ones take the bread out of the mouths of those who are more retiring and humble. But have you been painting lately, my dear, or have you come to ask me to give you some more lessons?"

"I don't think I can afford any more lessons just at present; but, Oh, dear Mrs. Hartwood, I would so love to buy one or two of your beautiful designs when you have done with them; the last was so much admired. I copied it three or four times on different colours and every one admired it. May I buy this one of the dear little fishes and water sprites? I think it so pretty."

"I am afraid this one would be more money," demurred Mrs. Hartwood. "I am obliged to charge more for those new ones, they have given me a great deal of thought and time; you would not perhaps care to pay so much for them. I am obliged to ask fifteen shillings for each of these designs; it sounds a great deal, I know; but if you knew what they had cost me!"

They had cost her exactly fourpence each. That was all she had given to the poor dying boy upstairs, who had been ordered beef tea and wine and jelly by the doctor, but who often had no money to buy them with, for his sister's small earnings in a seamstress's underground work-rooms was all that both had to depend upon to pay for rent and food and firing. Often and often the poor fellow lay in the cold of his bare and fireless garret coughing his soul out and wasting away for want of the nourishing food and the medicines which the doctor had recommended, whilst in his ignorance he was thankful enough to take the few pence which Mrs. Hartwood paid him for his clever little

sketches, which she gave him plainly to understand she only bought of him out of pure kindness and charity.

"It does not do to pauperise the poor," Mrs. Hartwood used to say to herself as she came downstairs with her bargains in her hand, if ever a qualm of conscience crossed her mind about young Salter's designs; "and after all, a shilling to him is as much as a guinea would be to me. Besides, who would buy them if I did not?"

But she pocketed the fifteen shillings Ida Vincent paid her for the poor boy's little picture quite complacently and contentedly. "I will buy Allan a bunch of grapes out of this money," she said to herself, presumably to tranquillize the remnants of her conscience; "I saw some yesterday at the green-grocer's round the corner, at one-and-ninepence a pound. I suppose they must be Hamburg grapes as they were so cheap, but they looked quite as nice as English hothouse, and poor dear Allan Salter will never know the difference. Half a pound will be quite as many as he can eat, and will please him immensely, no doubt."

Ida Vincent paid for the design and Mrs. Hartwood promised to send it her by post as soon as she had done with it herself.

"Ah, my dear," she remarked, as she snapped up the spring of her purse upon the fifteen shillings, with a deep sigh, "you rich women, lapped in luxury, have no conception what hard and up-hill work it is for a poor lady who has seen better days to support herself in this great rich extravagant city!"

Ida Vincent was standing before the mantelpiece; above it hung a water-colour picture of indifferent merit. It represented Marshlands Church and Vicarage on a very idealized scale, with Fenchester Cathedral spires in the distance.

"Dear Mrs. Hartwood," said Ida, gazing intently upon this work of art, "I have so often longed to ask you about those better days I have heard you mention. Your poor husband was a clergyman, I know—was it there that those happy years you so often allude to were spent? A church, a vicarage house—this must be surely a picture of your old home, Mrs. Hartwood?"

"Yes, that is indeed the place, Miss Vincent, where those blessed years of my life with my lost beloved were spent! Alas, I was perhaps too much wrapped up in earthly happiness in those days, and things of this world, as I need not tell you, my dear,

are not meant to fill our hearts too much—it is through sorrow that we must be purified,” added the good lady piously.

“It is a charming spot,” continued Ida, who was still looking up with rapt admiration at the spinach greens of the water-colour sketch over her head; “did you not tell me once that your old home was in Fenshire?”

“Yes, it was in Fenshire; Marshlands was the name of the village.”

Miss Vincent was silent for a moment, and a wave of dull red flushed across her pale face; her heart began to beat with suppressed excitement.

“I was sure of it!” she thought; “it must be the same place—there cannot be two villages of the name of Marshlands in Fenshire.” Then aloud she said quietly, “What a curious coincidence, and how small the world is! Do you know anything, I wonder, about a Miss Forrester who lives in that part of the world?”

Mrs. Hartwood gave a quick upward look and then bent down again over her painting; Ida Vincent was cunning, but she was not at all clever—Mrs. Hartwood was cunning and clever too.

“What does she want to know? why does she want to know anything? and how much will she pay for the information?” were the questions that rushed through the elder woman’s mind as she carefully sketched in a scarlet demon balancing himself on his three-pronged spear.

“Forrester?” she repeated thoughtfully; “there were several Miss Forresters, I remember. Yes, I knew them all—they lived in my husband’s parish.”

Miss Vincent came and sat down beside her and took her hand, so that Mrs. Hartwood was perforce obliged to stop painting.

“Dear Mrs. Hartwood, then I am sure you will be able to relieve the great anxiety my greatest friends are enduring at present. You have heard me speak of my kind friend Mrs. Roscoe, who lives close to us?”

“Oh yes, of course, and of her son, the handsome young barrister. I remember perfectly; you used to tell me all about him when I first gave you lessons three years ago. You told me how clever he was and how attentive to yourself, and you showed me his photograph, my dear Miss Vincent, and you must really forgive me when I tell you that I built up quite a little romance in

my mind about my kind young friend and the good-looking barrister she talked about so much."

"You must forget all that, Mrs. Hartwood, for there is nothing in it at all," said Ida colouring; "Cecil Roscoe is only dear to me as a brother—and it is because I am so fond of him, and of his mother, that I feel so anxious about his happiness just now. He is engaged to one of those Miss Forresters of Marshlands, and I want you to reassure me, dear Mrs. Hartwood, you who must know so well all about the family, for poor Mrs. Roscoe and Mrs. Torrens are suffering so much from the dreadful things they have heard about this girl and her family—they feel so uncomfortable about the engagement, and they would be so thankful if any one who like yourself has known them all intimately would tell them how false these reports are; they would be so glad if you could speak a good word about this girl whom they know so little of."

Mrs. Hartwood withdrew her hand gently from the grasp of her former pupil.

"Which Miss Forrester is it?" she inquired, as she resumed her work.

"It is the youngest, Eleanor, or Nell, as they call her. She is very beautiful—but oh, dear Mrs. Hartwood, do tell me that she is good as well as beautiful; that she is worthy to be our dear Cecil's wife? that is what those who care about him long to know."

Mrs. Hartwood's face was bent over the painted satin, she filled in the outline of a skeleton in silence. All these years she had waited, knowing that she had something to tell, which other people did not know, and which some day it might be of advantage to her to disclose, and in all these years Mrs. Hartwood, it is needless to say, had not grown more charitable or more lenient in her judgments of others, whilst the hard work of a daily struggle for bread had brought out yet another unlovely trait in her character.

There had arisen in her at this time a greed for money which had been unknown to her in her more prosperous days. It is a quality which advancing years is apt to foster in all of us. Other passions fail and fade with years, but that strong devouring longing for money often does but grow and strengthen and intensify, as we ourselves grow older. And it is not only in the rich that this thirst for gold is to be seen, poverty develops it

just as well as wealth ; in fact, there is something about a never ending and sordid struggle for a living which tends most especially to cultivate and to promote its increase.

Yet, Mrs. Hartwood had in some ways a high sense of right and wrong, and was by no means an entirely bad woman. Although, for instance, she took Allan Salter's brain work and turned it to her own advantage, nobody could have said that she was not kind to him. She often went upstairs and sat with him in the afternoon when the light had grown too bad to see to paint, and she would read to him the psalms or the lessons for the day, and would talk to him by the hour about the beauty and duty of patience and resignation to his trials, and she often took him little things, flowers or fruit, when they did not cost her too much, trifles which filled the simple boy's heart with gratitude and affection towards her.

Nor, to do her justice, would Mrs. Hartwood have told a lie or borne false witness against any one on earth. She was perfectly genuine when she made reply in answer to Ida Vincent's question :

"My dear Miss Vincent, I cannot tell you anything that is not true, even to allay your friends' uneasiness, or to lull you into false security about Mr. Roscoe's engagement. You must not not expect me to cry 'peace, when there is no peace.' I hope I know how to do my duty always, and to bear witness to the truth."

And, to do her duty, meant to Mrs. Hartwood in this instance to blacken Nell Forrester's character, and to prevent her from rising out of the mire where she believed her to be lying. Mrs. Hartwood had always, ever since meeting her with Colonel Darley in London, believed Nell to be thoroughly bad, and if the time had now come for her to disclose those terrible things that had come to her knowledge on that occasion, well, God forbid that she should shrink from that which she honestly conceived to be her duty. Only, she was poor and she wanted money badly, and so she was not going to say what she knew unless it was made worth her while. Also, she was clever enough to guess that Ida Vincent did not want her to prophesy smooth things about the girl who had supplanted her in Cecil Roscoe's affections. She divined that Ida, remembering that she had lived in the same parish as the Forresters, had come here to-day on purpose



to find out something about Nell which should, if possible, put a stop to the marriage.

"She is in love with the man, and she would like to part him from Nell Forrester," she thought. "It is natural enough, and in the interests of morality it would be certainly very wrong to let the poor young man walk into such a marriage in ignorance of the true nature of that girl."

"My dear," she said aloud, "I am not an ill-natured woman, and I have no desire to mix myself up with other people's affairs; at the same time there are certain things that came to my knowledge some time ago, which opened my eyes at once and for ever to the true character of the young lady to whom your friend is unfortunately engaged."

"Yes, yes?" and Ida became a little breathless with her excitement, "but they believe, you know, that this girl is better than her sisters?"

"She is no better," replied Mrs. Hartwood severely. "I am sadly afraid that she is in fact worse than her sisters, and they are all bad—all those Forresters; but, my dear Miss Vincent, it would be quite impossible for me to speak of such things to you. A girl, so well brought up as you have been, should be in absolute ignorance of the wicked things that go on, alas, too often in the world. It is only to an older woman, to a married woman, that I could possibly open my lips concerning certain dreadful facts that were once brought under my very eyes."

"You will at least then come with me, dear Mrs. Hartwood, and see my friend's mother? or his aunt?"

"I cannot promise—the fact is, I cannot afford the time; time is money to me, and every moment that I waste means so many shillings out of my pocket."

"There shall be no loss to you, dear Mrs. Hartwood," cried Ida eagerly. "I will see myself that you are not out of pocket, that you are amply repaid. I am rich, you know. I will pay you anything—anything you like to name, if you will only save my poor friend from this designing girl."

And after that Mrs. Hartwood and Miss Vincent began to understand one another thoroughly and entirely.

*(To be continued.)*

## Thackeray's Lord Mohun.

WE do not usually think of Thackeray's novels as historical, yet in some of them there are many interesting and correct portraits of celebrated personages painted against a background that is an equally true representation of the great scenes in which they played their parts and of the period in which they lived.

History, though woven with the thread of imagination, loses none of its truth. The story adapts itself to the historical setting, as ivy climbs a castle wall and twines itself about the turrets and battlements, not destroying the outlines, but lending beauty to the old weather-beaten towers.

Thackeray has made himself so much at home in the eighteenth century, and treats the persons of that time with so much familiarity, and knows even those of little fame so intimately well, that the wayfaring man, though by no means a fool, may easily err by mistaking some of the minor historic portraits for creations of the author's imagination. In "Henry Esmond" we, of course, recognize Marlborough, Addison, Steele, the Duke of Hamilton, the Chevalier de St. George, and other well-known persons as historic characters.

Few readers, however, unless they have made a study of the period, are aware that Lord Mohun, the Earl of Warwick and Holland, Mrs. Bracegirdle, and other characters which appear for a moment upon the scene in "Henry Esmond," played their parts in the real drama of life, and had their entrances and their exits, as well as the great duke or the good Queen Anne.

In following the career of Charles, Lord Mohun, it will be seen that Thackeray has taken many of the events in his lordship's life and woven them into the story, usually changing the actors in those events, or altering the parts so as to introduce some of the fictitious characters of the novel. Such changes in circumstances of little historical importance are permissible, indeed, necessary, in a novel, and are indulged in, even more freely, by Sir Walter Scott.

The chief events which have transmitted Lord Mohun's name to us are his two trials before the Peers for murder, and his duel with the Duke of Hamilton, in which both combatants were killed. It is principally from the "*Record of State Trials*"\* that Thackeray has drawn his picture of Lord Mohun. Outside of this record very little of his biography has been handed down to us, except a few brief references in contemporary letters and newspapers.

We know, however, that the family was old and aristocratic. That my lord† himself was quite a swell in his time is evident enough from the fact that he was a member of the Kit-Cat Club along with a brace of royal dukes and half-a-dozen of their graces of the ordinary kind, including Marlborough, besides other distinguished noblemen and commoners, such as Sir Robert Walpole, Dr. Garth, Sir Richard Steele, Congreve and Addison. Sir Godfrey Kneller was limner of the club, and painted the portraits of the forty-eight members on small canvases 36 by 28 inches—a dimension which is still termed "Kit-Cat size." These portraits, with the exception of Marlborough, are now at Bayfordbury Park, the residence of W. R. Baker, Esq., J.P. Mohun is represented in the flowing periwig and many-buttoned coat of the period, holding a snuff-box in his left hand. That the face is not impressive may be the fault of the artist. There is a strong family likeness between many of Sir Godfrey's portraits—a resemblance which is made more striking by the similarity of wigs and costume.

Thackeray has made Lord Mohun a greater villain than he seems to have been in reality. That he was dissipated there can be no doubt. It is mentioned as a vastly surprising fact that, when on a certain diplomatic mission with Lord Macclesfield,‡ Lord Mohun kept sober the whole time. But if his lordship was fond of drinking and fighting, what man of fashion was not? It was the age of Congreve and Swift, neither of whom was

\* "*Record of State Trials*," edited by Howell.

† He was the son of Charles, 4th Baron Mohun, by Lady Philippa Annesley, daughter of Arthur, Earl of Anglesey.

‡ Lord Mohun married, 1st, Charlotte, daughter of Thomas Mainwaring, by Lady Charlotte Gerard, sister of the Earl of Macclesfield; and 2ndly, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir T. Lawrence and widow of Colonel E. Griffith.

spotless; the age of Addison, who (according to Walpole) "died of brandy;" the age of Sir Richard Steele, the "Christian hero," who was always ready to drink and equally willing to fight when drunk.

Fighting and drinking were favourite sources of amusement and occupation among persons of quality. Even the queen is accused of drinking to excess, and the great officers of state had no aspirations for blue ribbons, save those of "garter" blue.

The events which led to Mohun's first trial for murder are incidentally mentioned by Thackeray in "Henry Esmond," in the scene at Drury Lane Theatre on the night of Castlewood's duel. "Between the acts of the play the gentlemen crossed over and conversed freely. There were two of Lord Mohun's party, Captain Macartney in a military habit and a gentleman in a suit of blue velvet and silver, in a fair periwig with a rich fall of Point of Venice lace—my lord the Earl of Warwick and Holland. My lord had a paper of oranges which he ate and offered to the actresses, joking with them; and Mrs. Bracegirdle, when my Lord Mohun said something rude, turned on him and asked him what he did there and whether he and his friends had come to stab anybody else as they did poor Will Mountford."

It would be unfair to leave Lord Mohun under the shadow of this crime. From the evidence in the trial we learn that the deed was done by Captain Richard Hill, a friend of Lord Mohun and lover of Mrs. Bracegirdle, the reigning toast and favourite actress, at whose shrine Congreve laid his plays and his heart for a season.

As Mrs. Bracegirdle did not look with favour upon the captain's suit, he determined upon the heroic measure of abducting her. Accordingly, one night, he and Lord Mohun with the aid of some soldiers surprised the beauty near Lord Craven's house in Drury Lane as she was walking home with her mother and a Mr. Page. Mohun was waiting in a coach into which Hill and the soldiers endeavoured to force Mrs. Bracegirdle, but fortunately her mother caught her around the waist, while Mr. Page called for help so loudly that several persons rushed to the rescue and prevented the execution of the design.

However, my lord and Captain Hill, with wonderful assurance, insisted upon escorting the actress to her lodgings in Howard street, where they remained walking in the street with drawn

swords, waiting, it appears, for Will Mountford, an actor who lived near by and of whom Captain Hill was jealous, believing him the favoured rival in Mrs. Bracegirdle's affections. The captain had a thirst for wine as well as for revenge, so the gentlemen ordered a couple of bottles from the nearest tavern and drank them in the street.

Presently the watch appeared and demanded: "Gentlemen, why do you walk with your swords drawn?" To which Mohun replied haughtily: "I am a peer of England; touch me if you dare!" and "this ancient and most quiet watchman," discomfited and abashed, shrunk away into the night. The watch had hardly gone when Mountford came down the street on his way home. Mohun advanced to meet him and began to talk with him, evidently trying to bring about some sort of reconciliation or truce of arms between him and Captain Hill; but while they were still in conversation, Hill came up, struck Mountford with his left hand and instantly with his right plunged his sword into Mountford's body. Mountford grasped at the hilt of his own sword, but fell forward mortally wounded, unable to strike a blow.

Hill fled, but Mohun gave himself up, was tried by the Lords in Westminster Hall and acquitted, as it appeared from the evidence that he had endeavoured to pour oil on the troubled waters and would have been specially glad to prevent the deed as he was not only a friend to Hill but to Mountford also.

The duel which led to the second trial of Lord Mohun is the prototype of that in which Lord Castlewood is killed by Mohun in "*Henry Esmond*." It will be observed in reading this trial that Thackeray has availed himself of nearly all the circumstances of time and place, but that he has changed the parts, introduced new characters and given Lord Mohun a more prominent and less desirable place.

This duel took place on the night of 30th October, 1698, and in it Captain Richard Coote of the Guards was slain. Mohun and five others who had taken part in the affair were tried for murder; but it will be best to describe the particulars of the duel in their proper place in the trial of Lord Mohun.

A state trial before the peers of the realm was a solemn and impressive pageant.

On the morning of the 29th March, 1699, the Lord High Steward of England, Lord Somers, was waited upon at his house

by the judges, attired in their scarlet robes ; the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod carrying the Lord High Steward's white staff of office ; a herald acting in the place of Garter King-at-Arms, who could not attend on account of illness ; and a Sergeant-at-Arms bearing the mace.

The party took their carriages (that of the Lord High Steward having six horses) and drove to Westminster Hall by way of Old Palace Yard, where they alighted and proceeded towards the House of Peers by way of the Painted Chamber.

The peers, in their robes, were already assembled, and, it being about one o'clock, the house adjourned to Westminster Hall, one of the heralds summoning each of the lords by name.

A procession was formed in this manner :—

The Lord High Steward's attendants, two and two,  
The Clerks of the House of Lords,  
Two Clerks of the Crown in the Courts of Chancery and King's Bench,  
The Masters in Chancery, two and two,  
The Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Trevor,  
The Judges and Chief Justices,  
The Peers' Sons, two and two,  
Four Sergeants-at-Arms, with maces, two and two,  
The Yeoman Usher of the House of Peers,  
The Peers (uncovered), two and two, beginning with the youngest barons,  
Four Sergeants-at-Arms, with maces, two and two,  
A Herald and a Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod,  
The Lord High Steward alone, covered.

The procession passed through the Painted Chamber, the Court of Requests and part of the Court of Wards, through a door between the Courts of Chancery and King's Bench into Westminster Hall, where the peers took their seats. The Lord High Steward's attendants stood on the left of the throne, the sons of peers on the right. Black Rod and the Herald came before the throne, made their obeisance, and then stood by while the Lord High Steward performed the same ceremony. Then his grace, attended by all the Sergeants-at-Arms, together with the Herald and Black Rod, having saluted the peers, repaired to the woolsack, where he took his place, the Herald on the right and Black Rod on the left, the eight Sergeants-at-Arms standing on each side a little in the rear.

Then the Clerk of the Crown, standing below at the clerk's table, commanded :

"Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation," and the sergeant shouldering his mace, proclaimed :

"O yes! O yes! O yes! My Lord High Steward, his grace, does strictly charge and command all manner of persons here present to keep silence upon pain of imprisonment.

"O yes! O yes! O yes! All manner of persons who are obliged to give their attendance here this day before his grace, my Lord High Steward of England, let them give their attendance forthwith."

*Clerk of the Crown* : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation again."

*Sergeant-at-Arms* : "O yes! O yes! O yes! His grace, my Lord High Steward of England, does straightly charge and command all manner of persons here present to be uncovered."

His grace then came down from the woolsack and occupied a chair placed upon an ascent before the upper step of the throne, and the Sergeants-at-Arms unshouldered their maces.

*Clerk of the Crown* : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation again."

*Sergeant-at-Arms* : "O yes! O yes! O yes! Chief Governor of the Tower of London, bring forth the body of your prisoner, Charles, Lord Mohun, forthwith, upon pain and peril will fall thereon."

Lord Mohun, who had been conveyed up the river in a State barge, was brought to the bar by the Governor, being preceded by the Gentleman Jailor of the Tower bearing the axe.

As he advanced up the house he bowed to the Lord High Steward, and then to the lords on the right and on the left, all of whom returned the salute. His lordship then took his place at the bar, the Gentleman Jailor standing on the right with the axe, the edge turned from the prisoner.

The Lord High Steward addressed a few words to Lord Mohun, and the Clerk of the Crown read the indictment, rehearsing the story of the duel and charging that, "You, the said Lord Mohun, together with the said Richard French, Roger James and George Dockwra, then and there feloniously, wilfully, and of your own malice aforethought, were present, aiding, abetting, comforting, assisting and maintaining the said Edward, Earl of Warwick and Holland, the said Richard Coote in manner and form aforesaid, feloniously, wilfully and of his



malice aforethought to kill and murder; and so the said Edward, Earl of Warwick and Holland, and you, the said Charles, Lord Mohun, Richard French, Roger James and George Dockwra, the aforesaid Richard Coote, in manner and form aforesaid, feloniously, wilfully, and of your malice aforethought did kill and murder, against the peace of our sovereign lord the King that now is, his crown and dignity. How say you Charles, Lord Mohun: are you guilty of this felony and murder whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty?"

*Lord Mohun*: "Not guilty."

*Clerk of the Crown*: "How will you be tried?"

*Lord Mohun*: "By God and my peers."

*Clerk of the Crown*: "God send your lordship good deliverance. Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation."

*Sergeant-at-Arms*: "O yes! O yes! O yes! All manner of persons that will give evidence on behalf of our sovereign lord the King, against Charles, Lord Mohun, let them come forth and give their evidence, for now he stands at the bar for his deliverance."

The Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Trevor, opened the case for the king, and then witnesses were examined. It appeared that on Saturday night, 30th October, 1698, there was a small but jolly party of young officers of the Guards and men of fashion assembled at the "Greyhound," that fashionable tavern in the Strand, where, as Vanbrough remarks, "one may have a dish no bigger than a saucer that shall cost him fifty shillings."

Besides Lord Mohun there were Captain French, Captain George Dockwra, of the Grenadier Guards, Captain Roger James, of the Coldstream Guards,\* Captain Richard Coote and the Earl of Warwick and Holland. These last two were firm friends. The captain, having an income quite insufficient for his position in society, dined often at the "Greyhound," in the earl's company, and at the earl's expense, and had even bought his commission with money advanced by his lordship. This earl is the one we have already met in "Henry Esmond," behind the

\* The title of captain seems to have been given these gentlemen by courtesy, for the rolls of the Grenadier and Coldstream Guards show that Dockwra had the rank of ensign, and James that of lieutenant at this time. I have been unable to verify the rank of the others.

scenes at Drury Lane Theatre, and he possesses some additional interest for us in that he is the grandson of the first Earl of Holland, from whom Holland House derived its name. He himself was one of the owners of that house, afterwards so celebrated for the wit, beauty and fortunes of its inhabitants during the time it was owned by the Lords Holland of the Fox family. The widow of this Earl of Warwick and Holland afterwards married the celebrated Mr. Joseph Addison.

These lords and gentlemen had gathered together about ten o'clock in the evening and remained until an hour after midnight. What happened during that time was described by Lord Warwick at his own trial before the peers in these words: "For some time he (Captain Coote) and we were very friendly, and in good humour, as we used to be with each other; but then there happened some reflecting expressions from Mr. Coote to Mr. French, who thereupon called for the reckoning, and it being paid we left the upper room, and I proposed to send three bottles of wine to my own lodging and to carry him thither to prevent the quarrel. But while the company stopped to call for a glass of ale at the bar below, Mr. Coote (whose unfortunate humour it was sometimes to be quarrelsome) did again provoke Mr. French to such degree that they there drew their swords, but we then prevented them of doing any mischief."

Warwick does not give us the words which so enraged Captain French, but one of the witnesses testified that after the party had come downstairs Captain Coote said: "I will laugh when I please and frown when I please, damme," and it was then that swords were drawn. Captain Coote and Lords Warwick and Mohun were at the time standing outside the bar and the other three within it. No one was hurt in this preliminary skirmish except Lord Mohun, who was wounded in the hand while trying to separate Coote and French.

Meanwhile, chairs had been called, and Captain Coote went out and got in the first, but Lord Mohun followed him and swore that there should be no quarrel that night, but he would send for the guards and have French and Coote secured. He moreover said he would go and spend the night with Coote, or that Coote should come with him to his lodgings at Westminster. Being thus persuaded, Captain Coote left his chair and came into the tavern, but after a little more conversation they all went out

again. Coote and Warwick took the first two chairs, and Lord Mohun got into the third, ordering the chairmen to follow the other chairs and take him to his lodgings at Westminster.

"We don't care a farthing for them," said Captain Dockwra, looking after them; "we will fight them at any time." Then he, French and James entered their chairs and followed the others.

The first three chairs had turned into St. Martin's Lane when Mohun, perceiving that they were not going in the direction of Westminster, called to the chairmen to stop, and all the chairs were set down in front of the "Cross Keys" tavern.

"Whither are you going?" asks Lord Mohun of Captain Coote.

"To Leicester Fields," is the reply; and then, as one of the chairmen testified, "my Lord Mohun did beg heartily of Captain Coote to go home and let the business alone till another time; and, indeed, I think I have never heard a man beg more heartily for an alms at a door than he did that they might not go into the Fields then."

At this moment the other three chairs passed up St. Martin's Lane, and Captain Coote insisted upon following them, threatening to run the chairmen through if they did not overtake French's party.

"Well," said Mohun, "if you *will* go, I will go and see it."

All the gentlemen were set down at Leicester Fields, and walked off into the gloom.

It was nearly two o'clock, Sunday morning, and the darkness was so intense that they could see scarcely two sword-lengths before them.

From the conversation among the officers of the guards the next morning, we learn that the combatants fought three on a side—Coote with French, Warwick with James, and Mohun with Dockwra.

It was over in a few minutes. Some of the chairmen had stopped to light their pipes before returning home; suddenly there was a call for chairs from the upper end of the Fields. Upon answering the summons they found French and James supporting the almost lifeless body of Captain Coote. The chair was lowered over the rails and an effort made to put the dying man into it, but it was found impossible.

Captain French was also badly wounded and was carried to

the house of Mr. Amey, the surgeon in Long Acre, whither Lord Warwick, who was slightly wounded in the hand, was also carried. Dockwra and James followed them later, but neither of them was wounded. After staying an hour or two, these two captains, together with Lord Warwick, repaired to the "Ship and Castle" in Cornhill, where my lord arranged some affairs with his steward before leaving town. Lord Mohun had left Leicester Fields, alone, and gone into hiding to escape the long term of waiting in prison until the assembly of the peers, by whom he wished to be tried.

There was no evidence produced to *prove* that Lord Mohun had taken any part in the affair, except in trying to prevent the quarrel; and although there is little room to doubt that he fought with Dockwra in the duel, no proof could be brought.

After the witnesses had been examined, Lord Mohun rose and said: "My lords, I hope I shall make my defence against this accusation with all the modesty and submission to your lordships which becomes me. I am very much ashamed to be brought before your lordships upon any such account as this again, after having been once before your lordships upon such an account before. I may very well say I am not guilty at all of having any hand in Mr. Coote's death, and I can assure your lordships I will avoid all occasion of giving you any trouble of this nature for the future. I do not doubt but to acquit myself of all guilt in relation to this matter; and, indeed, with submission to your lordships, there has been no evidence given relating to me that does infer any guilt upon me, to prove that I was at the place where the fact was done; therefore I shall only make some few little remarks upon what has been said and leave it all to your lordships' consideration."

He then proceeded to sum up for himself, and after that, the Solicitor-General, Sir John Hawles, summed up for the king; and the peers adjourned to the House of Lords to consider the verdict.

After about two hours' deliberation they again returned to Westminster Hall, taking their places as before, and again the Sergeant-at-Arms made a proclamation for silence.

Then said the Lord High Steward: "Is it your lordships' pleasure to go on now to give your judgment?" and the lords responded as usual: "Ay, Ay."

*Lord High Steward* : "Then I must pray your lordships to give me time to write down your opinions distinctly, so that I may be able to acquaint you with certainty of the numbers."

Then his grace stood up, and, addressing the youngest baron present, said: "My Lord Bernard, is Charles, Lord Mohun, guilty of the felony and murder whereof he stands indicted, or not guilty?"

Lord Bernard, rising in his place uncovered, laid his right hand upon his heart and said:

"Not guilty, upon my honour."

The same question was put to all the lords severally, and they all responded in the same manner. Finally, the Lord High Steward, placing his hand upon his heart, said:

"My Lord Mohun is not guilty, upon my honour."

Then he sat down and counted the number of peers who had given their judgments.

"My lords, eighty-seven of your lordships are present, and you are all unanimously of opinion that my Lord Mohun is not guilty of the felony and murder whereof he stands indicted."

Again the Sergeant-at-Arms proclaimed silence, and once more Lord Mohun was escorted to the bar by the Gentleman Jailor and the Governor of the Tower. His grace acquainted Lord Mohun of the verdict. Then my lord made his reverence to his peers and said:

"My lords, I do not know which way to express my thankfulness and acknowledgment of your lordships' great honour and justice to me; but I crave leave to assure your lordships that I will endeavour to make it the business of the future part of my life so to behave myself in my conversation in the world as to avoid all things that may bring me under any such circumstances as may expose me to the giving your lordships any trouble of this nature for the future."

And then, bowing again to the lords, he went away from the bar.

After another proclamation of silence the Lord High Steward said:

"My lords, the trial being at an end, there is nothing remains to be done here but the determining of the commission."

*Lords* : "Ay, ay."

*Lord High Steward* : "Sir Samuel Astry, let proclamation be

made in order to the dissolving the commission of High Stewardship."

*Clerk of the Crown* : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation."

*Sergeant-at-Arms* : "O yes! O yes! O yes! My Lord High Steward of England, his grace, does straightly charge and command all manner of persons here present, and that have here attended, to depart hence in the peace of God and of our sovereign lord the king; for his grace the Lord High Steward of England intends now to dissolve his commission."

The white staff was now delivered to his grace, and standing up, he took it in both hands and broke it. Then, coming down to the woolsack, he said :

"Is it your lordships' pleasure to adjourn to the House of Lords?"

*Lords* : "Ay, ay."

*Lord High Steward* : "This house is adjourned to the House of Lords."

Thus ended the state trial, and Lord Mohun was free.\*

His lordship's last duel was the most celebrated. His grace the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun had quarrelled over the property of Lord Gerard, an uncle of their lordships' wives, who were cousins. The quarrel became so fierce that the duke and my lord agreed to meet in Hyde Park early Sunday morning, 15th November, 1712. Colonel Hamilton, of the Foot Guards, was second to his grace, and General Macartney second to Lord Mohun. Such was the rage of the principals that they fell upon each other in a kind of fury, scarcely attempting to parry at all.

Each received several thrusts and both fell mortally wounded.

It was said by the Tories that after the duke had fallen, Macartney came up and stabbed him again. They also asserted that the quarrel over Lord Gerard's property was only a pretext, and that the real reason for the duel was that the duke had just been appointed ambassador to the court of France; and the Whigs, fearing that he would use the advantages of his position

\* French, Dockwra and James had already been tried at the Old Bailey and convicted of manslaughter; but having pleaded the Benefit of Clergy, were released after a short imprisonment. The Earl of Warwick had been tried the day before Lord Mohun, and convicted; but upon praying for the Benefit of Peerage, he was immediately set at liberty.

to bring about the restoration of the exiled Stuarts, had hired Mohun to kill him.

The Whigs, on the other hand, were equally loud in their assertions of innocence.

Neither side could prove anything, and every man formed his opinion in accordance with his politics.

The Tories denounced his lordship roundly, for their cause had suffered a severe blow ; and these accusations have done much to prejudice him in the minds of many historians and writers. But party feeling was strong in those days, and due allowance must be made for the bias of judgment caused by hatred of the man who brought about the death of a person of so great importance to *la bonne cause*.

It cannot be denied that Lord Mohun fought, and drank, and indulged in the dissipations of the town, but nearly every one did the same in those days ; and his lordship does not seem to have been worse than his contemporaries, for he is often found attempting the rôle of peacemaker, as is shown in both these state trials.

As to his conduct in the quarrel which led to his last duel, we can hardly form a correct opinion. We have only the accusations and counter-accusations of two opposing political parties. We cannot hear his own defence, for he appeared before a tribunal whose records we cannot read.

JAMES GUSTAVUS WHITELEY.

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## M.P. for Mornington.

### CHAPTER I.

THEY were leaning together over the side of the P. and O., watching the faint green line that had been Colombo. Miss Ross had turned away impatiently, and was gazing into the deep.

Mr. Vereker, with a rather feeble attempt at a smile, was evidently trying to be calm.

"I did not quite catch what you said, Miss Ross—will you kindly repeat it?"

"It is hardly worth repeating," she said, without looking up. "I only said I guess Americans have better tempers than the English—as a nation, of course—one can't trust samples."

"I think you are trying to get up a quarrel," he went on, with some emotion.

"Who? I?" raising innocent grey eyes in widest surprise. "Why, I wouldn't quarrel with a Britisher, and an M.P. with the whole of parliament at his back—not for the wide world! When I see people getting cross, I just put a stop to it—so—" with a gesture of her white hands.

"How? Do you find it so easy?"

"How? why, by arbitration."

"And who arbitrates?"

"Oh, I do."

He laughed. "Miss Ross, you are incorrigible."

"No—I am not—only I like fair play, and I can't see you trample on the whole army without a word. They have won my *respect* and *admiration*."

"Fortunate army! but it was the civilians I spoke of."

"Oh, the civilians are beyond me altogether. I don't believe Indian civilians are even human; they are quite perfect! Even Cæsar's wife, in her wildest dreams, never attempted to approach them! If you are going to say anything against an Indian civilian I can have nothing more to do with you."

"And you are sure you are not prejudiced, Miss Ross?"

"Not in the least"—with emphasis. "Did you see that

shark? I wonder why he follows us so persistently. Perhaps he thinks we have a Jonah on board."

"If you mean *me*, I must say, in self defence, that I had nothing to do with the breaking of the shaft."

"No. I cannot go as far as that," she said frankly, "even though you *do* irritate me! Well, it gives us the more time to discuss your theories."

"You laid unpleasant italics on that word."

"I always talk in italics."

"May I say, without irritating you, that I think I deserve some consideration, because I am going out to India simply to prove my theories are facts."

Miss Ross lifted her eyes—beautiful grey eyes with black lashes—and looked at him steadily. Then she laughed.

"I believe every M.P. in the world is cast in one mould," she said. "You are full of prejudices, full of ideas, full of theories, and all the facts have to fit into the spaces between. You have read in some foolish newspaper article, written by some ignorant man, that India is not really very hot, and the mosquitoes tickle you pleasantly in the warm weather, and the overpaid officials live in luxury, and lounge about on long chairs, leaving the native minions to govern India. As to the soldiers—oh, I have no patience to talk about the soldiers," she broke off impetuously. "How you can speak slightly of your beautiful, beautiful army—you a Britisher—when even I, a real patriotic American girl, feel tears in my eyes even when I see them march past, I cannot imagine."

"Well, don't cry over them now, Miss Ross," he said hastily, "and we'll leave them at once. We will only discuss the civilians. They don't make you cry, do they?"

"No," said Miss Ross. "I fancy the military clothes have something to do with it, and the long boots, and the band! Now I come to think of it, I fancy the band affects me most, but I love the whole show. The upright colonels, and the stout majors, and the interesting captains, and the fatigued lieutenants. It must be a lovely thing to be proposed to by the British army."

"You would like the band to accompany the proposal, of course."

"Mr. Vereker," she said gravely, "can you never be serious?"

"I hoped you had forgotten the old discussion," he said. "Is

it to begin all over again? After all, I am not such a brute as you make me out. I am going to give up a whole year to the study of India on the plains. When the heat becomes unbearable—if the heat becomes unbearable—correcting himself with a faint smile, "I shall go to the hills and write up my notes."

"Your notes?" echoed Miss Ross, lifting her eyebrows.

"Yes—my notes," he repeated firmly. "I believe the work in India might be done *as* well, and more economically. I believe that the age of luxury should die a natural death here, as elsewhere. I believe that the climate has many advantages which are not taken into account in the matter of pay, and that this running off to the hills in the early spring—the *early spring*," he repeated warmly to a pair of innocently raised eyebrows, "is the ruin of commerce in India, as it is the ruin of legislation. India will never be a great country whilst —"

"Oh, no never," interrupted Miss Ross, shaking her head sagely. "I am glad you grasp that. Now, you can enjoy this lovely climate, and the *early spring*, and the brain-fever bird and the early and late punkah, and the prayers for the Viceroy, and all the Indian luxuries, and if you are as truthful as you pretend to be, and as unbiassed——"

"I *am* unbiassed——"

"Then, in six months' time, I shall expect you to arrive humbly in Simla, and say, 'You were quite right, Miss Ross, it *is* hot, and the Indian civilian is an ideal man!' I shall be quite contented with that."

"Ah, will you indeed," said Mr. Vereker.

"That is to say," Miss Ross corrected herself with alacrity, "if we ever get to India at all. After all, it depends on the shaft, and that shark has a very persistent look."

"What an unpleasant idea."

"I believe," said Miss Ross, lifting her grey eyes gravely, "one might live in India so long that a cool grave in these green waters would be almost pleasant by contrast."

"You have a poor opinion of India then?"

"I *have*," she said emphatically.

## CHAPTER II.

THEY were leaning over the side of the vessel again, for the last time. A full moon was shining down on to Miss Ross's

brown head, and on to another handsome head that was suggestively near her. Perhaps it was the moonlight—perhaps it was the prospect of the coming separation, that gave a touch of picturesque sentiment to the solitary figures. At any rate, there was not much sentiment about Miss Ross's first words.

"I implore you, Mr. Vereker—I beg and implore you not to be wafted about by every bit of gossip in the clubs, or every chance word at the band! Do try and take a calm, and serene, and impartial view of the natives."

"I did not come here to-night to talk about the *natives*," he said gently.

"Never mind what you *intended*," she said, with a slight addition of colour. "You came to talk to me, and nothing interests me just now except the natives. I feel," throwing back her head and gazing into the star-lit heavens, "as if I was really assisting the wheel by giving the fly a shove onwards."

"I don't care particularly about India—to-night," he reiterated.

"Ah, but I do! Now, when you first set up house, every one will tell you unpleasant stories about the servants. They will tell you that the cook strains the soup through his puggaree, and the khitmutghar clothes his family in the dusters, and the bearer drinks the lamp oil, and ——"

"I don't care a—a—bit," he broke out impatiently, "about the bearer, or the cook, or any of them; they may drink anything they like, or wear my clothes, or strain the soup through my dress coat, if only you will listen to me!"

"I will listen if you will talk about the natives," said Miss Ross obstinately. "I have got to unburden my soul. I feel like a kind of prophet."

"Then please prophesy about something else, or let me suggest a suitable subject. Don't prophesy about the natives to-night. I don't care about them."

Miss Ross lifted her arms from the railing and looked him over in the moonlight from head to foot. "Ah, I thought not," she said. "I wanted to make you tell the truth," and, without another word, she walked away to the companion ladder and down to her cabin, and shut herself and her neglected prophecies in for the night.

After she had gone, Mr. Vereker continued to lean over the side of the vessel, looking moodily into the sea. He said some-

thing about the natives—twice over—that it was just as well Miss Ross did not hear, and then he felt calmer.

"Well, I shall not have any other opportunity," he said at last, "but there is still Simla! or one could write! Oh, no, not to her," hastily; "she would slip out of anything on paper. Well, there will be a storm to face at home, so, perhaps, it is just as well to pave the way, and, after all, this winter's work is cut out—and, again, there is Simla."

He stood tapping the ground with his boot thoughtfully, then he looked at his watch. "Nine, only nine! the longest evening since I came on board." Then he, too, went downstairs and wrote up some of his notes in the saloon.

### CHAPTER III.

THREE months afterwards Mr. Vereker was still of opinion that India was a delightful country. He was thoroughly enjoying the winter—not dashing about from place to place "doing" India by steam and telegraph, but settled down in one station, that considers itself the centre of civilization and the capital of the north-west; and, so, was seeing the pleasantest side of Anglo-Indian life.

The "notes" were in abeyance, but his keen insight and active mind made him an interesting and agreeable companion, and many officials cherished him in their bosoms, unconscious of the opportunity for future gibbeting that they so gave him.

For he was strangely in earnest in this, as in everything that he undertook. He really *did* believe that the life of an Indian civilian was principally a life of pleasure, with a small leaven of work, which was performed in a perfunctory manner at a large expense to the public and the government. He had a belief, born of intense ignorance, that the rains were cool!—that there were five months of winter, and three of rains, leaving only four to be accounted for, out of which, probably, every man got his sixty days' leave!

"I think I can convince Miss Ross," he said cheerfully to himself.

It was curious how necessary it seemed that Miss Ross should be convinced, and how much harder it was to instruct her than it would have been to instruct the Government of India, or the English Parliament.

In the meantime, Miss Ross also was enjoying herself extremely, and, every now and then, a chance word in a station letter, or in the list of appearances at a ball, gave him a glimpse of her whereabouts. Once or twice an infatuated young man had come back to the station, raving about the grey eyes, or the brown hair, which he would minutely describe, whilst Mr. Vereker writhed under the infliction, as if he did not know, as well as these others could do, the beautiful droop of the lashes on the pale cheek—the swift upward glance—the soft rings of hair on the white forehead. Once, one man, blundering more than his fellows, added a little to the usual information.

"I happened to mention your name, old fellow, and she said she came out with you. She knew your name. I don't think she had seen much of you on board, had she? I offered to bring a message, and she said, 'Perhaps you would not remember, or would not expect one,' or something of that kind; but she is not a girl one could forget, is she?"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Vereker tamely, and then he slipped away and worried the best part of the night over her half-message, which was no message at all.

At last the winter drew to an end. The careless creepers flung their glory from tree to tree, then paled, and faded, and strewed the ground with red and gold. The gardens brightened up into brief beauty, and some one had heard the first "brain-fever" bird, and some one else's "*dhirzee*" was working at the punkah fringes. Amongst the departures for Simla, Miss Ross's autograph was to be found in the Kalcha books, and Mr. Vereker settled down to his hot weather with admirable cheerfulness.

"And when he *can* go away," people said, shrugging their shoulders. They did not respect his mania, because they did not believe in it. They said, oracularly, "Wait and see." And whilst he, too, was pondering over punkah fringes and therman-tidotes, a new idea was suddenly presented to him, for the commissioner, whose wife and children were leaving for Simla, asked him to come and share his bungalow, and Mr. Vereker jumped at the offer.

"If you are determined to stay down," Colonel Prescott said, "come and cheer me up, and let me show you the reverse of the shield, and, when you have borne enough, I will

take you away into a land of tigers, and we will have a big shoot."

"Borne enough!" Mr. Vereker repudiated the expression, but he settled down very happily into his comfortable quarters, and wrestled no longer with his cook.

Mrs. Prescott was the typical "mem sahib" of more modern India: the lady whose life is sacrificed to her household gods, and whose home is principally on the ocean wave. Eighteen years of separation and independence had saddened her, and dulled her capacity for happiness, but, as far as she had energy to be glad of anything, she was glad to leave Mr. Vereker with her husband.

So he sat between them at dinner, and felt melancholy at sight of the fair face, harassed by its superabundant cares, and hoped that if he ever married . . . . But a vision of grey eyes came before him, and interrupted the train of his thought.

"After all," he thought, as he looked at Mrs. Prescott, "India is not quite the paradise for women it is represented at home."

The children were good little pale things, with serious faces and precocious ideas. It seemed as if they wanted to be naughty, but had not the energy, so they relapsed into fretfulness instead. They were rather appalling, and, on the whole, he breathed more freely when their last day came, and they said good-bye to him solemnly.

Mrs. Prescott, looking pale and sad, stood outside the railway carriage close to her husband, but keeping the whole, incapable *ménage* under her eye.

"No, Tommy; you shall have the filtered water presently. Ayah, Tommy sahib is not to drink any more. Keep still, Lucy; that is the window, not the door—you cannot come out that way. Oh, John, the punkah fringes are in the leather box on the verandah. Ram Chand will put them up. He is *six annas* a day—not *eight*, remember. Don't let cook cheat you too much, and treat Mr. Vereker well. And write, darling—please write, and tell me all the news. I shall be so dull. Three long months! Tommy, don't undress yet. Oh! and Lucy's boots. I am so glad I remembered them. They are coming by V.P.P., and you must send them on."

"I will try and remember. Vereker can put it in his notes.



Ah, here is the engine. Jump in, little woman. Be happy; at any rate, be as happy as you can."

"Happy!" The pale lips smiled faintly—years ago they had been sweetly curved, and so pretty. "In heaven, perhaps, where there is no means of locomotion. I don't even want *wings*. That is my idea of peace, Mr. Vereker," still smiling faintly as the train moved on.

The words gave Vereker a new sensation, not suitable for the note-book. He realized that there are some losses for which the most generous salary cannot compensate.

#### CHAPTER IV.

MR. VEREKER was full of health, and spirits, and energy. Moreover, it was his first hot weather, which goes a long way towards making the heat bearable. Also, he looked forward with a buoyant hope, born of ignorance, to the rains. Having no necessity for occupying himself, he laid out his plans systematically, and really managed to enjoy himself very well. He played polo three times a week, and tennis in the intervals. In the mornings he wrote to the papers on the advantages of the hot weather, and worked up his notes, and in the evening, when he was not driving out, he argued with Colonel Prescott.

The more he saw of him in his own home, the more he appreciated the intelligence, and refinement, and wonderful pluck of his friend, but he could not help deploring his lack of energy. He told him how far better it would be for him if he threw himself heart and soul into projects for reducing his own salary, and making the government of India a less expensive business. "I dare say I bore you," he said feelingly, "but you cannot think how it strikes a man just out from home. You have only to bear the heat for a few months, and look forward to the winter—and the rains."

"I have got into a habit," said Colonel Prescott drily, "of looking forward to the summer—and the rains."

"But why don't you make the best of the pleasures you have?"

"Because, to me, there is absolutely no pleasure during the hot weather—except drink. The rise and fall of nations is nothing to me in comparison with whether my peg is properly iced or not. All the morning I look forward to a melon at lunch, and all the afternoon I look forward to a peg at dinner."

Mr. Vereker looked at him compassionately. "*I don't feel that,*" he said, "and it is all new to me."

"*Because it is new to you. To me it is all twenty-one years old.*"

"*Do you never look forward?*"

"*Not further than my leave. My life is bounded by the 15th of July.*"

"*But you like this station?*"

"*I like it because it is easy to get away from. No, Vereker, it is no use trying to make me sentimental over India. I work hard, because I get interested when I am brought into actual contact with the natives, and I like camp life; but station life does not suit me, and I loathe the heat. A land of sin and snakes, as the Americans call it.*"

"*Don't think me impertinent,*" said Mr. Vereker earnestly, "*but your pay is high?*"

"*Not half high enough. Why, the mere changes from station to station take up half your pay, and then the miserable rupee, and the journeys home, and the constant sickness on the plains, and the two establishments if your wife goes to the hills. Oh, no, it does not pay.*"

Mr. Vereker looked crestfallen for a minute—then he rallied. "Well, we will make a truce," he said; "we will never touch on any subject nearer than the 15th of July."

"Ah," Colonel Prescott lifted his head, "there is life in the thought of freedom and coolness. Why, I live for it, and afterwards I live on the remembrance. You don't know what it is, old fellow, to feel your energy, and your spirits, and your youth burn slowly out in this God-forgotten climate. You may fight against it—you may, to a certain extent, circumvent it—but you cannot escape it. Sooner or later, the ghosts dogging your footsteps close in, and you have to give it up. They call it by different names, but it is all the same in the end. Home and comparative happiness again, or disease and death, and a corner in the dreary churchyard—and, in a month, oblivion."

"That I do not believe," said Mr. Vereker warmly.

Colonel Prescott smiled. "You are as bad as my wife. She says I am a pessimist, and perhaps I am."

From that day the compact was kept, and nothing nearer than the 15th of July was ever discussed, for the prospects of the great "shikar" occupied all their thoughts, and most of their spare

time. Everything was arranged to perfection—stores, guns, ammunition, elephants. No contingency was unprovided for. As far as human foresight could go, there was no fear of failure. And, as the rains grew nearer, even Mr. Vereker owned to himself that it was hard work keeping up a semblance of cheerfulness. The monotony of the long, dull days weighed on his spirits, and he realised, in a small degree, the boundless patience, and dogged perseverance, that come in to the government of India. In a faint, half-ashamed manner, he even began to excuse the exodus to the hills—but he never complained. He had nailed his colours to the mast, and they rested there; but the talks of the great “shikar” grew more interesting, until it seemed at last almost a matter of life and death that there should be no delay.

When the rains broke, he went through all the agonies of prickly heat; otherwise he was perfectly well. But Colonel Prescott had to contend with an old enemy, and suffered from days and nights of fever. He grew pale and emaciated, but he laughed at the idea of sick leave. He always suffered from fever in the rains, and another month would see them out of this.

It was hard work fighting through the daily routine of work, but he was accustomed to it, and he looked forward breathlessly, feverishly, to the day that should set him free.

The 14th was a particularly dull and depressing day, and Colonel Prescott was proportionately languid, but final arrangements had to be made, and packings accomplished, so he bestirred himself vigorously. “This is the worst of the year,” he said sitting on the camel trunk he had just packed, and looking out at the level bank of clouds that were heavy with thundery heat—“regular cholera weather. By-the-bye, the doctors prophesied an epidemic this year, but it seems to have been a false alarm, thank God,” leaning over to buckle another strap. “I don’t mind telling you *now*, old fellow, that cholera would have been the last straw. Only one more afternoon’s work, and then three months of freedom and rest.”

He went his way whistling cheerfully, and the last Mr. Vereker saw of him was his turning back at the gateway with a farewell nod.

It was late in the evening when he came back. He seemed unusually tired, and went straight on to the verandah, where he sat in the long chair, with his head resting on his hand.

"There is a case of cholera amongst my subordinates," he said suddenly; "the poor fellow is dead."

Mr. Vereker looked up startled.

"I am glad you are going," he said kindly. "You don't look fit to cope with cholera on the top of everything else."

"Going?" Colonel Prescott echoed, lifting his head. "Oh, of course, if there is the chance of an epidemic, there is no leave for me."

"No leave!" The other turned and looked at him.

"No leave," and he said it as quietly as if he did not care.

Mr. Vereker rose and paced the verandah hastily.

"Is it in the bond?" he said, pausing in front of the long chair.

"It is an unwritten law," answered the other. "Besides, I couldn't."

Again he dropped his head upon his hand, whilst Mr. Vereker paced the verandah restlessly.

"May I stay, too?"

He stood in the light of the lantern, bending his handsome head towards the still figure in the chair.

Colonel Prescott roused himself with a smile.

"You asked that as graciously as if you were asking for a fortune, but I must give an ungracious reply. 'No!'"

"I do not think I am worthy to ask it except as a favour," said the other, still in that strangely humble tone. "I should like to stay, that is all."

Colonel Prescott rose in silence, and they paced the verandah together.

"No," he said abruptly. "You do not know what it is. I am case-hardened; I have had cholera, and I have nursed so many. It would be too great an anxiety."

"And about—your wife?"

"I have telegraphed to her. She understands."

A vision rose before Mr. Vereker's mind of a pale face, with fair hair touched with grey, and wistful eyes that seemed to be always sad. He shook himself impatiently.

"And about the great shoot?" he said.

"Yes, I have settled that; you can join Thompson's party. He is a good fellow."

"And lastly—yourself?"

"Oh, I have not begun to think about myself; my hands will

be full for the next month. Please don't make a hero of me," he added hurriedly. "It is all in the day's work. Any man would do the same."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Vereker slowly, "that India is the only civilized country in which heroes are possible."

"*Rot!*" said Colonel Prescott. "So you will be off to-morrow."

"Yes, if you wish it; but not with Thompson. I shall go to Simla."

"To Simla? *You* have not a wife there."

"No, but I shall go and see yours; and besides—well, there is a girl there," hesitating a little. "*No, nothing of that sort*, on my honour; but I came out on board ship with her. Miss Ross."

"Ah, yes; I know Miss Ross."

"Well, I have something to say to her."

"Ah," again with that suspicion of a smile. "It is a long way to go unless it is something very important."

"It *is* important. No, you are quite wrong. *It is nothing to do with that*. I only want to tell her India *is* hot, and, well—to answer another question she asked me about Indian civilians."

"And you could not answer the question for six pies by post?"

"No," plucking up spirit. "I could not, and if you know Miss Ross, as you say, I need not tell you it would be worth while crawling to Simla *on your knees* to answer her least question."

## The Captives of Surah Khan.

### CHAPER I.

FAR distant in time and place: the time that of the former Afghan war, the place an outlying fort in the Afghan's land.

Over all that land the hot blast of war had blown, scathing the fruitful orchards of the Cabul valley, where the products of the temperate and torrid zones grow side by side in rich profusion ; dyeing the mountain streams with human blood, and choking the mountain passes with the bodies of the slain.

Some months have elapsed since the fatal retreat from Cabul, and the terrible slaughter of the Khyber Pass. Sale's brigade still occupies the fortress of Jellalabad, hourly expecting the reinforcements which do not come. Long have they watched and waited, but to them have come only " the remnants of an army." One man, a surgeon in the service of the Shah, rode in one afternoon on a *yaboo*, or native pony, both man and horse nearly in the last stage of exhaustion ; and thus the menace of Akbar Khan has been literally fulfilled, that of all the compact little force which marched out of Cabul with colours flying and bands playing, and all the honours of war, he would leave but one man alive to tell what had become of the rest.

But up the rocky path which led to a native fort, many miles from Jellalabad, there rode one evening a small troop of native cavalry. Their leader, a man of some thirty years, was evidently a person of distinction, for he wore in his steel cap, fastened by a clasp of gold, an egret's plume, the badge of a chief or khan ; while the bridle and breastplate of his handsome Tartar steed were adorned with tassels of wild ox-tails, white as the snowy spume which flew from the sharp bit and flecked his sweat-stained chest. The young chieftain, heated with his long ride, had pushed up the sliding bar of his helmet to catch the evening breeze, and his dark, fierce, yet handsome face wore a look of triumph. His foray, whatever its object, had been successful.

The troop of men behind him, wild-looking bearded fellows, mounted on strong little horses, which in spite of their wiriness

showed signs of hard riding, were armed with long lances, the head of more than one gleaming redder than clean steel should have done, even in the strong glow of an Eastern sunset.

In their midst rode on a *yaboo* the fruit of their foray, a prisoner of war, in the person of a young officer of Indian Irregular Horse. The unfortunate prisoner had evidently been subjected to rough treatment. His wrists, tied behind his back, were bleeding from the stricture of the cord; his bare feet, fastened in like fashion beneath the pony's girths, hung wearily down without the support of stirrups. His face, smirched with dust, and blood that had oozed from a cut on the forehead, was downcast, and the hapless captive wore an air of complete dejection, in striking contrast to the brilliant captain in front.

The latter drew rein as they approached the fort, and turning in his saddle summoned to his side his *naick*, or subordinate officer. "Go forward," he said, "and say to the Shereef that Ahmed Khan comes in peace."

The man, saluting, set spurs to his jaded horse, and galloped up the steep path to the gate of the fort, returning with the customary "*Bismillah*," and the polite assurance that the presence of Ahmed Khan was as welcome to its inmates as dew to sun-scorched herbs. In a few minutes they were within its walls.

The fort was of the usual Afghan pattern, a rectangular building of mud and stone standing on a bare hill, with walls some thirty feet high, loop-holed, and flanked at each angle by a semi-circular bastion, the approach being defended by a wide and deep foss, which at this period of the year was quite dry. It was surrounded by an open upland, treeless and barren, the prevailing aspect of the country; its rich orchards and rice-fields being confined to the valleys, which are rendered fruitful by numerous streams. Thus the approach of an enemy could be seen from a long distance; and though the fort might not have stood for ten minutes under the fire of modern artillery, it was tolerably secure against the mode of warfare of the time and country.

Dismounted, not without assistance, for his limbs were stiff with cramp from a ride of fifty miles in so constrained a position, the captive was led at once into the presence of the castellan of the fortress.

In the *sunah-khaneh*, or private apartments, which were placed



for safety in the centre of the fort, the Shereef was found seated on his divan, smoking his chibouk with every appearance of beatified content, and surrounded by several ladies of his harem. These, less strictly secluded in Afghan than in Indian *zenanas*, were diverting themselves with sweetmeats, sherbets, and games of chess, while some of the younger found amusement in alternately petting and teasing a handsome child, a favourite son of the old khan.

On the entrance of the visitors all the ladies veiled save one, to whom the attention of the prisoner was thereby naturally directed. She was of very different type from the rest, being fair and her eyes of blueish grey, in notable contrast to the dark flashing orbs which gazed through the *bourkhas*, or veils, in curious or pitiful interest on the captive of Ahmed Khan's sword and spear. She sat, too, erect on her cushions, instead of reclining in the languorous attitude adopted by her companions. In Western dress she would have been taken for an European: probably, the prisoner thought, a Circassian, many of which race he knew were of fair complexion.

But he was far too anxious as to his own immediate fate to pay much heed to the ladies of the harem, however flattering their obvious interest might have been at a more propitious time. He had but slight knowledge of the Afghan tongue, and though the two khans spoke in measured tones, could make but little of a sustained conversation; but he watched keenly the countenance of the elder chieftain to learn what he could from that. The face of an Oriental autocrat is, however, but an unreliable index to the character, and with Asian still less than with European potentates politeness of speech is no guarantee of a corresponding civility of intention. The visage of the old khan was, moreover, one by no means easy to be read: even a skilled phrenologist might have been at fault. If there was benignity in the calm thoughtful brow, its effect was marred by the expression of the glittering eyes, too closely set, which, with the hawk-like nose, lent a predaceous aspect to the countenance. The lower part of the face, too, lent no assistance, being hidden by a flowing grey beard, which the aged khan had a trick of stroking at frequent intervals with a corrugated hand that for colour and texture might have been of bronze. Venerable or otherwise in character, he was evidently a personage of importance,

and was addressed with considerable deference by the haughty Ahmed.

Had the captive been able to follow their conversation he would have gathered that the younger khan was endeavouring to persuade the elder, whose kinsman he was, to take charge of his prisoner while he was engaged upon another expedition, the latter demurring until certain other obligations previously incurred should have been fulfilled.

"I shall owe you, my father," urged Ahmed, "gratitude and affection deep as the great well in the Bala Hissar, if you will do this for me."

"My son," replied the old khan, "already you owe me something more than affection and gratitude, even the amount of several lacs of rupees."

"My father, I shall pay you with the ransom of this Feringhi dog, whom you will keep safe for me but for one moon."

"But he belongs unto Akbar Khan," objected the elder man.

"Nay, my father," said the younger; "he would have done so had not I delivered him from the escort which was conducting him to the city."

"Then you will have to deliver yourself from the spearmen of Akbar when he cometh to hear of it," Surah rejoined dryly, with a humorous twinkle in his deep-set eyes. He was evidently tickled by the notion of such deliverance, for if Akbar enjoyed the first reputation in the land for avarice and cruelty, that of his young kinsman Ahmed was not far behind it.

"Be it so," assented Ahmed. "I fear no man. Nevertheless, keep the dog, my father, until Akbar hath forgotten his unworthy existence, when I will give thee one-third of the ransom which I shall exact for him from the English queen."

"But how know you that he is a sirdir, for the Feringhi queen may not care to redeem a mere *naick*?" the old khan demanded, being fully conscious that for no *naick* of his own would he have expended in ransom one single rupee.

"Then one-third of the price for which I shall sell him to some chief of Turkestan." And finally Ahmed gained his point, and went his way, leaving his captive in the custody of Surah Khan, Shereef of Khoord Sherghai, within fifty miles of the city of Cabul.

## CHAPTER II.

ON quitting the presence of the khans, the young Englishman was conducted across an inner court-yard, and along a stone corridor to a remote part of the fortress. His place of confinement was not a dungeon, but a bare vaulted chamber with a paved floor, fairly clean, and lighted, though somewhat dimly, by narrow slits high up in the massive wall. Here his guards, having supplied him with a pitcher of water and chupatties of flour, left him to his own reflections, which it may be surmised were not of the happiest character. He had arrived, however, at that stage of physical weariness, in which the mind of man becomes callous to its circumstances, and craves only for rest. Too fatigued to eat, he drank thirstily of the water, and with the remainder laved his swollen wrists and ankles. Then he threw himself on a rude palliasse of wool, which was in a corner of the chamber, and soothed by the semi-darkness of his cell, fell at once into a deep and dreamless slumber.

This youth, for he was little more, whom we leave thus for a brief space in the beatitude of unconsciousness, had within the last few months passed through such experiences as might well render him almost reckless of what further miseries fate might have in store. He was one of the victims of that unfortunate policy of the British Government, which took upon itself the dethronement of Dost Mahomed ; and then, having no capable ruler to set up in his place, left its hapless agents to bear the vengeance of that fierce and lawless race, whose boast it was that they could endure bloodshed, terror, and disorder, but never a master.

The regiment of irregular horse to which he belonged had formed part of the cavalry escort of that ill-fated force which, retiring from the Cabul cantonments, had been cut to pieces in the Khyber Pass. Detached on the third day from the main column to clear the surrounding heights of the hill tribesmen, who had harassed with a withering fire the line of march, his troop had found the task so much beyond their compass, that not only had they failed in their endeavours, but had been almost to a man shot down, or taken prisoner ; their captain, with a handful of men, contriving to regain the main body, only to perish

a few days later with the remnant of that fated host in the last stand at Gundamuk.

The cornet, his horse being struck by a heavy jezail ball, was thrown violently to the ground, and before he could disengage himself from his fallen charger, was captured by the Khyberees, who instead of ending his miseries then and there, as happened to many of his comrades, by a stroke of a keen Afghan knife, reserved him for ransom. Haled from village to village, dragged at the stirrup leather from one filthy dungeon to another, mocked, beaten, and starved, the unfortunate young officer had cause every day to regret that the ball which killed his gallant Gulf Arab had not struck himself instead.

Owing to the deposition of Dost Mahomed, who, however sharp a thorn he might have been in the side of the British *raj* in India, knew at least how to keep his own wild tribes in some sort of order, the whole country was now in more than its normal state of anarchy and confusion. The frontier tribes fought tooth and nail for the plunder and prisoners of the ill-fated English force, and the luckless Indian cornet passed from one owner to another, till at length, after a sharp skirmish, in which no opportunity occurred of fighting for his own hand, on this burning summer noon he fell into the hands of Ahmed Zoradah, one of the most valiant and enterprising of the younger Afghan chiefs.

Our young cornet had been reared in a Devonshire parsonage, and had imbibed with his mother's milk the orthodox precepts of his national faith. Otherwise, had he been a Mahomedan, he would surely upon waking from his slumbers have fancied himself in Paradise. For over him leaned the forms of houris; bright eyes gleamed in his lamp-lit cell, and a soft cool hand was laid with gentle touch on his fevered brow.

Fancying it must be a dream, he raised himself on his elbow and gazed bewildered upon his visitants. But it was no dream: beside him stood the fair girl he had seen in the *sunah-khaneh*, who looked upon him with a smile of kindly interest, while over her shoulder there flashed upon him out of a mist of gauze a pair of orbs such as his eyes had never before encountered, orbs dark as night, yet bright as the stars of night, whose radiance was veiled from him again the instant he became conscious of it.

Behind his visitors (women or angels he knew not which, for his brain was yet confused with the turmoil of the day and suddenly

awakened slumber) there stood a slave, bearing in his hands a tray which, at a sign from the veil-less lady, he brought forward. Then to the prisoner's great surprise she addressed him in his own language.

"I have received permission to speak with you, and to bring you refreshment. You must eat and drink, and then tell me who you are, and what fate brings you to this place." And taking the salver in her own hands she served him with dainty viands: an apricot cake wrapped in rice paper, chupatties of flour and honey, sherbet, and light Afghan wine.

When he had drunk and eaten, and his brain was clear, he recounted to her the history of his capture and adventures since the dreadful passage of the Khyber, and in turn she related her own. She also, it appeared, had been in the fatal march, and was one of the hostages surrendered by the English general to the cruel and treacherous Akbar, who, it will be remembered, obtained possession of the women and children unhappily attached to the expedition, on the pretext of affording them protection, representing that the Khyberees, over whom he had, or pretended to have, no control, would otherwise assuredly destroy or capture them.

"I am certain I have seen you before," the cornet said to his new-found compatriot, "though I do not know your name."

"It is Gabrielle Ashworth; and you have probably seen me at the embassy balls. And yours is——?"

"George Seymer, of the Sind Irregular Horse. And who is she?" he whispered, indicating with a glance the possessor of the star-like eyes.

"She is the khan's daughter, and has no business here, having accompanied me without leave. She insisted on coming to see you."

"Just as she would have come to see some rare and curious animal, a new species of antelope from the Terai, or a fresh-caught monkey," he said, with an assumption of offended dignity that was half affected and half real.

"Precisely," assented Gabrielle, with a mischievous light in her blue-grey eyes.

"Can you speak her barbarous language? If so, ask her what she thinks of me."

"I shall no doubt do that presently. I see she is taking you well in behind her *bourkha*. But just now I want to talk to you."

And seated side by side upon the couch—for there was no other seat in the cell—they conversed for nearly an hour upon their perilous situation, and the sad fate of their friends and comrades.

It was inevitable that Seymer should take the greatest interest in the companion of his captivity, and such interest was unlikely to be lessened when he discovered that she was a young lady of considerable personal attractions. Her face, if not consistent with the strictest canons of beauty, was that of a very good-looking and intelligent girl, while her form, clad in Eastern dress, a loose jacket opening over a snowy chemisette, and wide drawers, surmounted by a short skirt, cinctured at the waist by a *cummerbund*, or silken sash, appeared the perfection of grace. She wore no turban or coif, only her fair hair coiled in Grecian fashion upon her head. Except as to dress she was English throughout; and her voice, clear and low, was sweet and refreshing to the captive youth as the murmur of a brook in his native land.

She had not been badly treated, she said, in her captivity. She was lodged in the women's apartments as one of the family, yet was allowed more freedom than they. The old Khan, to whose lot she had fallen as a hostage, treated her with respect and kindness; and but for the terrible uncertainty as to the fate of her friends, and anxiety as to the ultimate disposition of herself (which indeed her very attractiveness rendered dubious), she would have even enjoyed her romantic situation and surroundings.

"I shall be quite a heroine if ever I get back to England, and be able to write a book of my adventures," she said almost gaily; yet as the thought of her possible fate, should her ransom fail, crossed her mind, the poor girl shuddered and shivered as with physical fear.

Then she told him how she had come to India with her sister, who was married to an officer in the 44th, and who would not leave her husband, so they had all come up together, and for a year life had been pleasant in cantonments at Cabul, but now—and when she thought on these things she wept, and Seymer seeing the hot tears well through her fingers and fall drop by drop upon his couch, felt miserable himself, and laid his hand upon her arm soothingly. Then finding she did not stop drew her gently to him, and kissed her out of pure compassion whereat she cried the more, being over-strung and unused to kindness from her own countrymen for such a weary while.



"God, help me!" she said, when she had recovered her voice. "And save me from the fate I dread."

"He will," Seymer answered, and in a flush of youthful chivalry added. "Possibly I have been sent here for that purpose."

Then Gabrielle rose to go, and as in English fashion he essayed to help her with her veil, he whispered something in her ear, whereat she threw back the veil again, and with a pretty blush returned the kiss he had given her.

The young lady of the flashing orbs had remained throughout the interview motionless, absorbed in every detail of it. This detail seemed specially to impress her, for she whispered something which again brought the colour to the cheeks of Miss Ashworth, and elicited the reply that it was an English form of salutation. To this the young lady promptly rejoined:

"I also will exchange salutations with the Feringhi after the English form."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort," Gabrielle exclaimed in alarm, for the slave, who had stood all the while like a statue of black marble, understood every word. "As it is, if you are discovered to have left the women's apartments at night you will be beaten. Come at once, before your absence is noticed." And passing her arm through that of the young Afghan beauty she hurried her from the cell; the iron-barred door of which the slave securely locked, leaving the prisoner once more to dreams and darkness.

### CHAPTER III.

IN none of his previous incarcerations had Seymer been treated with such consideration as he received in Surah's custody. That he owed this clemency more to the interest of his fellow prisoner than to any native gentleness of character in the old khan he readily surmised. Gabrielle was allowed to see him daily, and from what she told him, as well as from what he observed for himself, it was evident that the natural charm of her manner had its effect even upon the rugged old Afghan chief. That there might be danger no less than advantage in this he equally perceived, but forbore to give any hint which might recall the crueller perils of her situation, of which, as he knew, she was fully aware.



Youth is elastic and its recuperative power high, so that after a few days of better air and food, no one would have recognized in Ahmed Khan's captive the worn and dilapidated youth who had been helped from the *yaboo's* back in the courtyard of the Khan Surah's fortress.

He was allowed considerable liberty within the fort, though never permitted outside it ; whereas Gabrielle sometimes rode abroad with the old khan, a privilege she greatly enjoyed. It was delightful to canter the beautiful Arab pony upon which they mounted her across the plains, in the cool morning air, or to scale at a foot pace some mountain path from which were obtainable the grandest views she had ever seen ; though one square acre of her native Kentish soil was, she thought, worth all the Afghan land.

The less fortunate Seymer had nevertheless a magnificent prospect from the walls, whereon most of his hours were spent. The fort stood upon an eminence rising from the midst of a wide table land, hemmed in on all sides by mountain ranges, masses of black rock piled heap upon heap, in grotesque and endless confusion. On the one hand through the aperture of a deep gorge, a lovely vignette was afforded of a green and fertile valley, with the walls of distant Cabul and the fortress of the Bala Hissar frowning above them ; while on the other the view was more wildly grand, tier upon tier of mountain rising higher and higher, till in the furthest distance the snowy summit of the Hindoo Koosh pierced the very skies.

Over this vast and wild scene he would gaze sometimes for hours, regarding its rugged beauties with his outward eyes while his thoughts fled far away—back to the moors and glens of his native land, and happy days in the old Devon parsonage with its mullions and dormers smothered in honeysuckle, clematis and climbing roses, the scent of which seemed to come to him across these arid plains. Or, again, to more recent scenes, and his late comrades of the Indian Horse. How he missed them ! What brave lads had bit the dust in that Khyber Valley who but a short while before had been the life and soul of the mess-tent, and with all the zest of youth had raced their ponies across the dusty maidan, or ridden for first spear after the fierce wild hogs of the Deccan ! Now they had all passed out of his life ; it was unlikely he would see one of them more.

While indulging in these sad reveries Seymer was one day surprised by a lady, who came like himself to take the air upon the battlements. Supposing her to be Gabrielle, he turned to meet her, but Gabrielle had ridden out with the khan, and was not yet returned. Instead, Seymer found himself in presence of the young Afghan lady, who had visited his cell on the evening of his arrival, but whom he had not since encountered.

He was not particularly enchanted at seeing her now, fearing lest by a second clandestine visit she might get herself or him into trouble. The lady also appeared embarrassed, for she stood shyly a few paces off, first on one daintily slipped foot and then on the other, while at intervals she coyly peeped at him from her *bourkha*, and again retired within its protecting folds. Seymer was at first moved almost irresistibly to laughter, but when at length she so far overcame her shyness as to throw back her veil entirely, there was no laughter in him; he stood almost spell-bound by her loveliness. She was certainly the most beautiful specimen of womankind he had ever looked upon. Apparently about eighteen (though possibly younger, being of Eastern race), her figure though slight was fully developed and of exquisite shape, the lustre of her limbs glowing through the semi-transparent texture of her dress. Her eyes were splendid; if they had shone bright as a houri's in the lamp-lit cell, their radiance in the glowing sunlight was more wondrous still; the flash and play of them under their long dark fringes would have pierced the heart of an anchorite. Yet there was no gleam of coquetry in them; the clear brown of the iris shone but as with the dew of youth and health. Indeed that she was as much child as woman was apparent in every gesture.

Seymer, as may be imagined, was no anchorite, yet desired with all his heart that this vision of loveliness would depart, or that he might. So far from showing signs of departure, however, the girl, after by a steadfast gaze she had satisfied her first curiosity, advanced timidly and held out for his acceptance sweetmeats, caramels of pistachio nut and burnt almonds. Seymer could no less than accept of these, but was utterly unprepared for her next advance, which was to come close to him and put up her face to be kissed, as she had seen done to Gabrielle, whose form of introduction she was evidently copying in every detail. Overcome with confusion and with a fine blush on his

fair English face, Seymer complied with this sweet suggestion, not without an inward prayer that the jezailchi who kept watch over his movements might not be looking in their direction. His salute was returned warmly, and the introduction might be considered complete, the young lady being evidently impressed with the idea that it had now been accomplished in the most punctilious European fashion.

Being ignorant of each other's language they could not get much further, and thus "gravelled for lack of matter" (or at least any medium of expression) Seymer was apprehensive lest his fair companion might be of the same mind as Rosalind, and deem it a fit occasion for more kissing. Fortunately she seemed content to lean side by side with him upon the parapet, munching sweetmeats and regarding the view.

Presently they saw the khan's little *cortège* defile from a distant gorge, and come riding over the plain towards the fort. Seymer took his companion's hand and led her to an embrasure whence, without being seen themselves, a good view of the approaching party could be obtained.

They had been hawking; and the old khan, riding at the head of his little troop on his splendid chestnut Arab, with his falcon on his wrist, and his caftan and turban of green silk (for he claimed descent from the Prophet) and fine grey beard, made a striking picture; close behind him came Gabrielle, and beside her, escorting her with much gallantry, rode a younger chieftain with a plume in his steel-barred cap. His face was turned towards them as he rode by, and Seymer recognized the proud features of his captor at the same instant as his companion exclaimed in a sharp sibilant whisper, "Ahmed Khan!"

It was like the hiss of a snake, and the extreme virulence of her tone caused Seymer at once to turn and look at her. He was utterly unprepared for the storm of passion which in a moment had swept across her beautiful face, and darkened it as a thunder-cloud from the mountains darkens the vale beneath, while her eyes flashed like the levin which such a cloud emits. Indeed, the girl's whole being seemed charged with electric wrath; her nostrils quivered, her bosom heaved beneath its snowy veil like a troubled sea; she ground her teeth, and fairly stamped with rage. Never had Seymer witnessed such a tropical storm in woman. Before he had time to imagine the cause, she had

flung her veil across her face, waved her hand to him, and was gone.

#### CHAPTER IV.

IT was Gabrielle who explained the situation to him later in the day, when she came to tell him of Ahmed's arrival, and to confer with him on news he had brought and its import to themselves.

"What could have made her so mad?" Seymer asked; "was she jealous of Ahmed's attention to you? Does she love him?"

"No, you stupid man, she loves you. She was still in a most furious passion when I last saw her, sulking on her cushions. She has beaten her little half-brother, which I do not altogether regret, for he is a spoiled brat and needs chastisement, and has thrown her slippers at two of her step-mothers. She vows that if Ahmed has come to take you away, she will stab him to the heart as he leaves the fort, and I verily believe, unless she is locked up, she will be as good as her word."

"What a young termagant! I wonder if the khan would accept me as a son-in-law?" Seymer said reflectively.

"Possibly. It would be like Lieutenant Smith and Pocahontas. But you belong to the Khan Ahmed, and I doubt if he would forego your ransom."

"He might let that go as a wedding gift to his kinsman's daughter."

And thus with badinage did they beguile the period of suspense, striving to conceal their anxiety under the semblance of gaiety, as brave hearts have done in even direr straits.

For Ahmed had come with weighty news, of the relief of Jellalabad, and the advance of a British force upon Cabul. Such was the case. The treachery of Akbar had relieved the English Government of their obligations in respect of the agreement made by the commander of the retreating force (who did not long survive the disgrace of his partial surrender), and it was now resolved to release the hostages at the point of the bayonet rather than incur the humiliation of purchasing their liberty with gold.

This would have been welcome news to the English captives, but for the fact that the timely arrival of the vigilant Ahmed with the latest information gave the two khans opportunity to dispose of their prisoners. Theoretically Gabrielle belonged to

Akbar, who had allowed his hostages to remain in the custody of the subordinate khans, on the understanding that they should receive a part of the ransom for their trouble. But now Akbar had been defeated, and his choicest troops cut to pieces in a sortie from Jellalabad. He himself had escaped and fled to Cabul, but the bloom of his prestige was gone, and the ordinarily cautious Surah might play his own hand. Seymer was not a hostage, but a captive of Ahmed's, who was therefore regarded as his absolute and rightful owner. It was to confer on the important point, how to dispose of their property to the best advantage in the present crisis, that the two khans sat for hours in the *devan-khaneh*, or audience chamber, drinking strong coffee and smoking incessantly.

Surah conceived that he was far more interested than his relative. Not only was a third part of the ransom of Ahmed's captive due to him, but computing the value of their respective prisoners on the basis of the national tariff, his own was of far superior value. Ahmed admitted this.

"Why not," he urged, "sell them to some Tartar chief? That fair-haired girl is worth a *crore* of rupees. The Tartars are not, it is true, rich in rupees, but any one of them would give you six horses of the purest breed for her; while they will buy my dog for a slave. Intrust her to me, and I will ride at once with them towards the frontier. 'Ere nightfall we shall be beyond reach of these accursed Feringhis."

"I have as many horses as I desire," Surah objected, "and would fain have rupees."

"Even so; but you can sell the horses to the Feringhis. Their *sirdirs* are rich, and heed not what they give for a good nag. Afterwards I will recapture them with my spearmen, and you shall have rupees and horses too. As was the case before, so now not a dog of the Feringhis shall quit our country alive."

This happy suggestion told with Surah Khan. The idea of spoiling the English in this way was as pleasant to him as the thought of slaying them was to Ahmed. But there was another consideration, and a serious one to one who knew Ahmed so well as Surah did.

"How," he said, "can I be sure of receiving my captive's price? You may be robbed in returning" (pretend to be was what Surah had in his mind) "or fall into the hands of Akbar.

Moreover," he continued suspiciously, "you covet the girl yourself, and may be tempted to keep her."

Now this was precisely what Ahmed did intend, hoping to steal some horses from the Tartars wherewith to satisfy Surah. There would probably be some fighting over it which would add zest to the adventure. Fighting was as the breath of life to Ahmed; he was a warrior to the backbone.

He flushed angrily through the rich bronze of his haughty face, but answered quietly—

"It is true, O father, as your wisdom has discerned, that I have a liking for the damsel. Nevertheless I know that she is not for me. The peasant in the Cabul valley grows a luscious peach upon his wall, but it does not grace his own board; he sells it at the bazaar for what it will fetch. So will I sell your fair one, and bring you the price of her beauty's bloom."

"But what gage have I of your good faith? Twice have you failed me in the matter of payment; he who has deceived twice, may do so thrice."

"By the Prophet's beard I will swear to it; or you may send your *naick* in charge of the damsel."

"Nay, but I will go myself," resolved Surah, laying aside his pipe, and preparing to rise from his divan. "We will set out at nightfall."

"Shabash (agreed); there is a moon; we will mount to horse as she mounts the sky."

## CHAPTER V.

THE whole of that day Seymer spent upon the battlements in a state of anxious anticipation. Towards evening, when the air was cool and pleasant after the long day's heat, Gabrielle came to him again, this time with the definite intelligence that they were both to be removed that very night. Whither she knew not; she had simply been directed to prepare for a long ride, and had heard incidentally that he was to go too. Seymer sought to reassure her by the suggestion that they would be taken to Cabul for greater security; that the English would storm the city and deliver them from captivity. But Gabrielle was despondent. "We shall never," she said mournfully, "see an English face again." And folding her arms upon the parapet she leaned her head upon them in an attitude of despair, while the last beams of



day gilded her soft hair to a brighter gold, and the sweet breeze fanned her troubled brow.

Seymer regarded her wistfully. Whatever the separation which now seemed imminent might mean to Gabrielle, he felt that to himself it meant hopelessness and chaos of life. He had known her but for a few weeks, yet at his age a shorter time than this suffices for the growth of love. He had fancied himself in love, as boys will do, before leaving England, and since perchance when subjected to the influence of bright eyes and winsome ways on leave at hill stations. But he had never before known a girl like Gabrielle, and the friendly intimacy of their joint captivity had produced the almost inevitable result. It was, as will readily be conceded, a foregone conclusion. Better now it seemed to him, captivity with Gabrielle than freedom without her.

It was not a time for the tentative amenities of ordinary courtship, notwithstanding their seclusion and the sweetness of the evening hour. To intrude on the solemnity of her sorrow with the insistence of his love seemed almost a sacrilege; yet he was not able to forego the opportunity of this, probably their last interview, to ascertain if there was, or under happier circumstances might be, any requital of his affection. With stammering lips and husky voice he faltered out his love on the ramparts of that barbarian fort, as he might have done under the deodars of Simla, or out on some moonlit verandah, with the tremulous tones of a boy's passion covered by the crash of the regimental band, and the racket of the dance behind them.

There was neither coquetry nor diffidence in her response. She heard him throughout without lifting her head; but when he had finished and was waiting with breathless interest, all but love forgotten, she put out her hand to him, and that was all the answer she gave for the moment. But presently she said: "It is of no use to talk of such matters. Love, even life, seems hardly a thing to reckon on. It is death, or servitude worse than death, which apparently lies before us, before me at least; you may be sold into slavery, suffer for some years, and ultimately escape. For me slavery would be a shame and dishonour which I could not survive. Yet I am glad you have told me of your love, for I will not deny it is a comfort to me."

"But say that you return it, Gabrielle, if ever so little," he pleaded.



"I do, I do, you know that I do; but what is the use?" Nevertheless she gave him her hand again, which he covered with kisses.

"Is there no chance of escape?" he exclaimed impetuously, peering over the parapet, and scanning through the gathering dusk every outlook. "I feel but half a man that I do not save you. Our people cannot be far off, if we were once outside these accursed walls."

"We should but fall again into the hands of the Afghans, who are out in force, Ahmed says, to check the advance of the English. This is our only chance," she continued, producing from the folds of her cummerbund something which glistened as she placed it in Seymer's hands.

It was a double-barrelled pistol of English make, strong and well finished. Seymer noticed engraved on the lock-plate the name of a well-known Piccadilly gunsmith. It was long since he had handled such a weapon.

"No one has seen it," she said. "I have kept it hidden for the last emergency. See, here are two cartridges, one for me and one for you, if you chose to die with me."

"One for each of the two Khans rather," he muttered with his teeth close set.

"No, no; it would be of no use, we should but die a more terrible death. George, shall we die together here?" she whispered, drawing closer to him. "We could not bear to be parted now, could we? and the kind God will not be angry with us."

Her lips trembled as she spoke, but Seymer read in her eyes the steadfastness of her spirit. If his courage held good, hers would.

He sickened at the thought. "It must not be," he said. "We need not anticipate Providence, which may yet have a better fate in store for us; we will keep this for the *dernier ressort*," and passing his arm round her protectingly, he held her to him with her head leaning against his shoulder, their hands clasped together on the pistol.

Thus they stood for a long while, their hearts too full for converse, while over them the night began to fall, and the stars came out one by one till the whole dark vault of heaven was set with jewels, and the hour of their fate drew on.

Suddenly, far away to the north, there was a flash, and a trail

of light shot through the darkness, apparently in the direction of Cabul.

"It must have been a meteor," Gabrielle said.

But as they gazed in the same direction another and another followed, and presently were answered from the southward.

"Those are not meteors, but rockets," Seymer exclaimed.

The Afghans did not use them ; could the English be so far advanced ? A wild thrill of hope shot through him at the thought

But now the quick strokes of a gong quivering through the fort called the escort to be ready, and steps were heard of one ascending to call the prisoners.

"Take the pistol," Seymer whispered, "and conceal it. They will not search you, but me they may. Now, dear love, farewell, and God be with us."

And with a last hurried embrace they separated to prepare for their midnight ride.

## CHAPTER VI.

It was a picturesque sight as they mounted by torch light in the courtyard of the fort. The lurid glow fell on the bronzed lancers and swarthy *jesaülchis*, glinted from the polished arms, and shimmered on the sheeny coats and housings of the beautiful wild-eyed horses, which tossed their full manes and neighed eagerly as they pawed the flags, impatient to be off. Wrapt in a fur-lined *poshteent*, for the nights are cold in the Afghan highlands even in summer time, over the worn English-made habit in which she had been taken prisoner, Gabrielle was lifted by the gallant Ahmed to her saddle ; while the *yaboo* on which Seymer had been brought to the fort was again produced, and on its back he was bound in similar fashion. He was not, however, searched, and in his cummerbund he had contrived to secrete a keen Afghan knife which he had picked up during his captivity.

In a few minutes all was ready. The magnificent chestnut Arab of the elder khan was led forth, and stood proudly before the door of the *sunah-khaneh* in his gorgeous harness—a high-peaked saddle of stamped leather, its pommel and cantle embossed with silver, surmounting a handsomely broided *numnah*—tassels of wild ox tails, magenta dyed, depending from bridle and breast plate, and a head collar strung with silver bangles which jangled when he tossed his beautiful head.

Gabrielle gave a sigh of relief when she beheld the old khan stalk forth enveloped in his ermine-bordered *poshteen* and wearing *jorabs*, or high boots of brown leather, armed with enormous rowels. She dreaded before all things having to set out alone with Ahmed.

Having surveyed the whole retinue with a keen glance of his hawk-like eyes that noted every detail, the old khan swung himself into the saddle with the activity of a young man. He had been in his time a famous horseman, and when once in the saddle seemed to lose the weight of thirty years. Then when the stirrup cup had been handed round, to the captives first by Surah's command, and to himself last of all, he motioned Ahmed to lead the way, and beckoning Gabrielle to his side, placed himself in the centre of the troop. So with jingling bits and echoing hoof-strokes the little cavalcade filed down the rocky path, and was swallowed up in the darkness.

A tumult of impotent rage swelled in Seymer's breast as he was borne through the night a captive in the train of these insolent barbarians, and about to be sold for a slave to a race more barbarous still. Had he been well mounted and riding free like the rest, he might have enjoyed the journey, notwithstanding its object, for the night wind was cool and fresh after the day's great heat. But that Gabrielle should have seen him bound on his sorry steed with a filthy Afghan at each bridle rein! Ah, what would not he have given for one brief charge with his old troop, his good sword in hand, his gallant Gulf Arab between his knees, to rescue his lady-love from this band of brigands! Yet, had he known the tender pity for him that was in her heart, it would have given him no small comfort in his sorrow.

An hour past midnight a sudden halt was made, the reason of which Seymer, who was in the rear of the troop, did not learn. Soon they were in motion again, but as it seemed in a slightly different direction, and the moon, which was now up, though veiled in fleecy clouds which rendered her light intermittent and uncertain, enabled them to push on at a somewhat quicker rate.

Again, at a moment when the light was almost obscured, there was another halt; something evidently was wrong. Could they have missed their way? It was unlikely with a guide who knew the country so well as Ahmed. Before Seymer had time to con-

jecture there were a couple of shots in front, and then a sound which thrilled to the heart-core of the captives—the sound of a British cheer. The position was clear to Seymer in an instant. The English had advanced more rapidly than Ahmed had conceived to be possible, and his night ride had intersected their line of march. On receiving the enemy's fire, the escort wheeled on the instant. Seymer made a desperate effort to force his pony forward, and shouted loudly for help; but the Afghans caught the *yaboo* by the bridle and pulled him round, while one of them struck his rider a violent blow which caused the blood to flow from his mouth. The next moment the whole cavalcade, with the exception of one man who had fallen, were again under cover of darkness.

The two khans brought their horses together and conversed, Gabrielle reining up beside them. Heavens! Why did not she wheel her horse and gallop forward? If only Seymer could reach her. He shouted to her, but was again smitten on the mouth, while at a sign from Ahmed, one of the men dismounted and held her rein; the chance was gone.

They halted now for half-an-hour. The surprised picket kept up a brisk fire in their direction for a few minutes, expecting a *chupao*, or night attack; but finding no reply was made, they soon ceased and all was again quiet.

The khans were divided in their counsel. They had arrived at a mountain pass which was evidently occupied by the English, but in what force they could not in the darkness discover. No watch fires were visible, and it was probably only a picket that they had stumbled upon. Could they push their way past this, their road would be open, except for hostile clans of their own race, to Turkestan. It was impossible to scale the mountain on horseback; they must either pass here or make for another defile some miles away, which was as likely to be occupied as this. The impetuous Ahmed was for making a dash in the dark and cutting his way through; the more cautious Surah for retiring.

They ordered Seymer to be brought forward, and questioned him in Hindustani as to the dispositions of an English force on the march. He answered with difficulty, for his mouth kept filling with blood.

"I cannot make out what the dog says," exclaimed Ahmed

impatiently. "Let the maiden speak for him. What says the son of an unbelieving mother—are there likely to be horsemen?"

"He says not likely," replied Gabrielle, instructed by Seymer, who had every reason for wishing the attack to be made; "only a picket of some dozen or so of foot soldiers."

"And we thirty spearmen, well mounted," exclaimed Ahmed, with all an Oriental's contempt for infantry. "I will slay a dozen of the infidels with my own blade. What says the dog further?"

"He says you should dismount and make the attack on foot, as offering a slighter mark for their bullets than man and horse together."

"Nay, by Allah, he is a fool; or rather he would have us worsted in the encounter. Tell him if he deceives me I will cut his throat from ear to ear." And from the ferocious scowl which accompanied this threat she doubted not he would be as good as his word.

"You have the pistol," Seymer whispered hurriedly, as he was being dragged back to be remounted. "Shoot him as you ride onward; it will be supposed he fell under their fire."

Ahmed Khan, collecting about him some half-dozen of his boldest horsemen, again placed himself at the head of the troop. Seymer was remounted, not again on the *yaboo*, but behind one of the lightest Afghans who rode a powerful horse. In the hurry of the moment they did not tie his feet, and in his previous struggles he had worked one hand loose. He felt he could slip it at any moment, but resolved to bide his time, lest the fact should be discovered. Gabrielle was placed in the centre beside the old khan, and the troop prepared to charge.

It was a moment of breathless interest for the two prisoners. Gabrielle's face blanched with womanly dread at the terror of the moment, but her lips were tightly set and her hand closed firmly on the pistol beneath her cloak.

They proceeded cautiously at a foot pace for some two hundred yards, when their leader suddenly striking spurs into his horse's flanks, broke into a gallop, and with wild cries from the fierce *Kussilbash* troopers, they dashed into the pass just as the first streak of dawn showed itself above the mountain tops.

A blaze of fire met them in flank and front, and again an English cheer mingled with the fierce yells of the Afghans,

several of whom reeled and fell at the first volley. Ahmed, shot between the shoulders, threw up his arms and tumbled headlong under the scuffling hoofs. Then they were among the bayonets, and the poor horses added their screams of agony to the general tumult, as the cruel steel was plunged into their quivering flanks. There was no space for ruth or pity. Wrenching his right hand free with a violent effort Seymer stabbed the Afghan behind whom he rode and rolled with him to the ground. The main body of the troop, despite the fall of their leader, fought like wolves in a trap and got clean away, the whole affair having lasted but a few minutes.

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When Seymer, stunned and dazed, for in the *mêlée* he had been severely kicked, stumbled up blinded with blood, he scarce knew where he was. Kindly hands grasped his ; a flask was held to his lips and friendly voices clamoured to know how he came to be *dans cette galère*. But he only gazed about him bewilderedly, asking presently for the lady—was she safe?

"The lady! what lady?" and one of the English officers tapped his forehead significantly for the enlightenment of the others.

After another sip at the flask he managed to explain, but they shook their heads. She must have been carried on with the Afghans or be among the slain.

Half stifled with emotion, Seymer staggered with them towards the scene of the late encounter. It was now dawn, and in the pale grey light could be seen five, or six bodies lying in the stony track, and among the scanty brushwood beside it, but they were those of men. Ahmed lay stark in the centre of the track with his handsome face upturned, his teeth locked on his lip, the light of life scarce gone from his fierce eyes. The English captain stooped and picked up his steel cap with its egret plume fastened with jewelled clasp, and an ensign drew the gold-hilted dagger from his belt and placed it in his own sash. Handsome trophies these of a hard campaign. But Seymer took nothing. He sat down on a boulder and hid his face in his hands, and recked not that the hot tears which welled from his aching eyes and trickled through his grimy fingers should be seen of men.



She was gone then, gone for ever, to that fate she had so terribly feared. Ahmed was slain ; she was safe from him ; but the avaricious Surah would inevitably sell her to the highest bidder among the Turcoman chiefs. He would never see her again. Yet he must ; he would—he would obtain a horse and follow them up and deliver her, or give himself again into captivity, for of what use was freedom to him, now he had lost his love !

Suddenly he was called by one of the English officers. He rose wearily and went to where they stood by the carcase of one of the horses that had been killed. Seymer recognized it as the Arab pony that had carried Gabrielle. Where then was the rider ? Could the retreating Afghans have found time to remount her and carry her off ?

No, beneath the pony's body, half buried in the brushwood, stunned and bruised she lay, the pallor of death upon her brow, with lips parted, and eyes closed as if in sleep. In a paroxysm of grief, Seymer threw himself beside the body, and covered the inanimate face with passionate kisses.

They pulled him away, saying she might not be dead. And happily it was so. One of them placing his hand beneath the *poshteen* declared he could feel the beating of her heart ; while another snatched the dagger from the young ensign's belt, and held it before her mouth. The bright steel was at once blurred ; it was evident she still breathed.

Overcome with joy Seymer walked away by himself into the scrub, where a veritable *Te Deum* went up from the depths of his heart.

It was, however, not for several hours that Gabrielle recovered consciousness, and two days elapsed before she could be moved from the hospital tent in which she was presently placed under the care of an army surgeon. She recovered in time to enter Cabul with the victorious troops, and looking out from her *dhooly*, beside which Seymer rode, saw the British flag floating over the great fortress of the *Bala Hissar*. The slaughter of the Khyber Pass was avenged.

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Some years later, when the memory of these events, which caused such a deep and sympathetic interest at the time of their occurrence, has been dimmed by the still more tragic episodes of



the Indian Mutiny, we will take a peep into the interior of an old Kentish manor house. In the hall, which is adorned with arms and Oriental trophies of various kinds, we meet again Gabrielle Seymer and her husband, together with an elderly clergyman, George's father. Gabrielle, though as a matter of course more matronly in appearance, is as fair and winsome in her husband's eyes as when they beheld her first in the fortress of Surah Khan. George, now Major Seymer, has returned lately from India, invalided, having been wounded at the siege of Lucknow. He still wears his left arm in a sling, yet hopes to enjoy his long and well-earned furlough; after which he and Gabrielle will return to India for the few years he has yet to serve for his pension. Their children, of which there are two, will remain with the grand-parents.

Gabrielle has taken from a stand of arms a pistol of old-fashioned make, which she handles thoughtfully.

"Why, Gay!" exclaims her husband, "that is the identical weapon which you carried on the night of our memorable ride in Afghanistan——"

"And with which I shot poor Ahmed Khan. It is sixteen years ago this very night, and the deed has weighed upon my conscience ever since. I shot him in the back, father, in the most cold-blooded way."

"Nay," George interposed, "there was not much cold blood about it. It was a matter of life or death, at least of freedom or slavery. At any rate I am thankful you had the courage to do it. Otherwise, I suspect that determined rascal would have rushed us through, and we should not have been here now. It was the fortune of war, and he richly deserved his fate."

"But, father, he was such a brave and handsome man. It will always be upon my conscience that I killed him."

"My dear," said the old clergyman, "you must not say that. It was, as was once said of a far more lamentable occurrence, 'a cruel necessity.'"

"There, Gay," her husband said, "now that you have received the absolution of the Church, your conscience may be at rest." And gently taking the pistol from her he replaced it in the rack; where, no doubt, it yet hangs, an object of interest and veneration to the little Gabrielles and Georges of a later generation.

## Travancore.

PROBABLY few of my readers have heard, or at least know much, of that narrow strip of land called Travancore, or the "Land of Charity," running up from Cape Comorin for some 200 miles along the western coast of India, and divided by the highest summits of the Western Ghauts from British India. Yet this strip is probably more fertile, and from many points of view more worthy of notice, than many other larger places in India, on which whole reams of paper have been spent.

The Rev. H. Mateer (London Missionary Society), for over fifty years a hard-working missionary in India, has written a few books about it, but these, though full of interesting facts regarding the caste customs of the natives, deal with it rather as a field of missionary work than from any other point of view.

Travancore, although under British protection, is ruled by a Maharajah, the succession going through the female branch—that is, the heir to the throne is not a son of the Maharajah, but of his eldest sister. These ranees are always married at an early age to a scion of one of the royal family in Travancore, who after his marriage is a person of great importance, far more so than are the sons of the reigning sovereign, and is called the "Vallia Tumberancee." The Maharajah himself lives in the capital of the country, Trevandrum, which is on the sea coast, about forty miles from Cape Comorin, south of Quilon. Unlike the native nobility of the north, neither he or any of his race have taken any interest in European sports, nor have they imbibed any European ideas, as such princes as Kuch Behar and others have done, and caste prejudices would probably prevent any of them ever going to England. But they have ruled the country for the last century wisely and well. There are several petty rajahs in the kingdom of Travancore, but these never do homage to the Maharajah, and are content to remain quietly at home, with their little ragged retinue of attendants.

The country is worked on similar lines to those pursued in British India, but with more leisure and less of that impetuous

haste so trying to the nerves of those employed by the paramount power. But good work is done, and the police, &c., lose nothing in comparison. The heads of the different departments (chiefly European) are settled in the capital.

The religion is of the Hindoo—most Hindooish. Travancore is called the Land of Charity, from the princely munificence bestowed upon the Brahmins. All the festivals are kept with the greatest strictness, and thousands of Brahmins are fed gratis on these occasions, besides having presents of money given them. Curiously enough, although it is the particular pride of the people from the Maharajah downwards to be the most orthodox Hindoos, yet Christianity probably flourishes more in Travancore than in any other part of India. The northern part is worked by the C. M. S., whilst the Syrian Christians—who claim to be in direct descent from the old Christian Churches—and the Roman Catholics have flourished for centuries, not only undisturbed, but countenanced by the powers that be. What advantage or otherwise accrues from this work is not in the province of this article to discuss. But if little success is made in the conversion of the higher caste, much is done by the establishment of schools and colleges and the spread of education, especially among the poorer classes.

Innumerable temples are scattered broadcast over the land, all under the rule of the high priest, a sort of glorified archbishop, whose word is law, and all these temples, several of which are hidden away a hundred miles in the dense jungle, are kept up by the state. Pilgrims in thousands visit the further ones to offer up worship and small sacrifices to the forest deities. In the secluded parts of the Travancore hills these temples are a very curious feature. They are built of masses of granite so huge in size that it seems impossible that they can have been moved there even by elephants. I have found little deserted shrines in the forest, against which numbers of these huge animals had constantly rubbed themselves, without moving a single pillar or stone. The most sacred of these temples, dedicated to *Tyapen* (the Travancore god of the forest), is called *Choweramallie*, and is situated in the middle of the densest jungle, surrounded by a grove of cocoa-nuts. The way this grove has been planted is somewhat curious. About the 15th of January vast crowds of pilgrims arrive there and spend a week offering *Pooja* to the god

Tyapen. They are bound to take only the barest necessities of life with them and may not stay in villages *en route*, but must camp out on rocks or bare ground. After fifteen visits a man is allowed to plant a young cocoa-nut tree, and every year afterwards that he visits it can plant another. Any one who has been there often enough to do this is a person of the greatest holiness, almost a minor saint. After various ceremonies the twelve or fifteen thousand pilgrims return to their homes, yelling incessantly the word, "*Tyapen*," making the whole place hideous with their cries, and driving every denizen of the forest into its darkest recesses.

The first time I heard it the inimitable verse of Sir Walter Scott's poem came vividly to my mind :

"Far from the tumult fled the roe ;  
Close in her covert cowered the doe ;  
The falcon, from her cairn on high,  
Lost in the mist her wondering eye,  
Till far beyond her distant ken  
The hurricane had swept the glen,  
And silence settled, wide and still,  
On the lone wood and mighty hill."

The temple itself is built of big blocks of cut stone, and is about 40 feet long and surrounded by a massive wall of roughly-hewed stone, which protects it from the playful attacks of the wild elephants. The interior of the temple is paved with cut stones, and on these are the most wonderful carvings of men and women—rude but picturesque specimens of art many hundred years old. I am bound to say the figures are not over-clothed, even for a native, but the art is not in the least vulgarized by this.

Flanking the temple are cut stone elephants and tigers, about the size respectively of English cows and sheep, which must have been done at great trouble, as every detail is correct. It was amusing to see how a wild elephant had tried his strength in endeavouring to knock down his stone brethren, which having been deeply imbedded at the foot of the great stairs, had resisted the attack with the patience of a stone. Two Brahmin priests keep watch and ward all through the year, and the offerings given are, I believe, simply enormous. This temple is in wonderful preservation and quite a curiosity of Eastern architecture. All over the hills are found barrows, and the most

perfect examples of these stand on a hill which rises abruptly some 800 feet from the Perriar river. They are huge masses of cut granite placed in regular order as to height, and run from 15ft. in height and 8ft. in width (the largest) to 3ft. by 1ft. (the smallest). There are no inscriptions on these rocks and no authentic native traditions about them, but they are supposed to be the burying-place of some old outlawed chief, who made these mountain fastnesses his stronghold, and whenever he could (in those, doubtless to him, good days) levied black-mail on the villages at the foot of the hills on either side.

Some of the festivals have curious origins. On one the Rajah goes with all his native officials to a rock outside the fort and there shoots at a cocoa-nut. This no doubt is a reminiscence of the old hunting *fittes*, which formerly all native princes enjoyed. Another one is, when food is prepared and set out for the spirits of departed ancestors, and the greatest of all is *Ornum*, the day on which the spirit of the greatest of all Travancore kings is supposed to revisit the earth, in the hope of finding his people happy. So for three whole days Travancore does no work, but feasts and dances that the Great Spirit may not be disappointed.

I have alluded before to the jungle temples, to visit five of which makes a Hindoo sacred—equal almost to a pilgrim from Mecca in the Moslem faith. The following description of one of them conveys very accurately the sort of shrines they are. All are situated on large rivers in the midst of probably as fine sylvan scenery as the world can produce.

*Todawella-Perriar*, though inferior to *Choweramullie*, in that there is no annual pilgrimage to it, is still the second most sacred temple to *Tyapen*, the forest god, and looking at it from an antiquarian point of view, it is a thousand pities that the Travancore *Sircar* do not take more trouble to protect it from the ravages of the wild elephants. The river here is very beautiful, about 100 yards wide, as it sweeps round the massive steps of the fane, almost washing into the sacred court, and swirling round vast boulders covered with green and red lichens, making them wear the appearance of veritable Brahmins (when men were giants) with all their caste marks on. So curious is this illusion that it is almost impossible to believe without a close inspection that they are works of nature, not of art. In one of the pools at the temple steps, innumerable shoals of fat *mahseer*

and carp are daily fed, and it is a curious sight to see the pool, not 10 yards square, first with a few fish paddling about. A little piece of grain is put in and the pool in a moment becomes alive with fish from one to four or five pounds in weight. Then the lords of the river, great monsters of twenty to forty pounds, come sailing in like great ships, driving the smaller ones from right to left, dashing the waters with their tails, till the whole pool is a black seething mass, the big fish always on the spot from where the grain comes; a perfect example of the good old rule

"That they should take who have the power,  
And they should keep who can."

So tame and secure do these fish feel that they will take the rice greedily from a man's hand when put in, only care must be taken to avoid a nip. But I have often seen a hillman perched on the rocks, forming the outside barrier of the pool, fishing for hours, with absolutely no result, although not 20 feet from the ravening crowd.

Of course, I need hardly say that in the pool itself no one of any nation or creed is allowed to fish.

The temple itself is much dilapidated by the assaults of elephants, and it is only the marvellous strength of the building that has saved it from total destruction. The elephant trench is all filled up, many stones are displaced, and the fine garden planted by General Cullen is a total wreck; only a few *casuarina* and Australian trees, which have grown to such an extent as to be impervious to harm, remain to tell the tale.

The quotation,

"Sunk are thy towers, in shapeless ruin all,  
"And the long grass o'ertops the mould'ring wall."

describes it exactly. It is deeply to be regretted that these old jungle shrines should be allowed to decay and fall away as they do. Travancore in many respects is a very favoured country. From the foot of the hills to the sea it is intersected by huge back waters, formed by the heavy rains from the hills above. This gives abundant opportunity for irrigation, so that a famine is an unknown and impossible thing—and yet only just enough rice is grown for consumption. But every bank and every square yard along the sea coast is crowded with cocoa-nuts, which are



the staple export of the country. The fibre is woven into mats and yarn, the inside into *copra*, whilst thousands of tons of oil are extracted; the whole of which is exported from the ports of Alleppey and Quilon, giving work and living to a population of over 300 to the square mile, the thickest populated country in the world, along the whole coast line.

Besides this, pepper, ginger and lemon grass oil are exported, and from the uplands the great monopoly of *cardomans* come in such quantities as to command the market, and this is also the case with pepper. On the hills above, which run from Anнимoddo, 8,000 to 9,000 feet, to Cape Comorin, but little above sea-level, runs a broken chain of *cinchona*, tea and coffee estates. These places send produce which is well known and appreciated in the London market, but have failed to bring themselves forward as Ceylon has, simply from want of large firms to advertise them. Probably the financial position of the Travancore estates would compare very favourably with that island. But capital and pushing are needed to the point where it should be, and considering that the yields of tea are quite 30 per cent. better than Ceylon, that there are untold numbers of acres lying untouched by the axe, and that the Government is both ready and willing to advance the enterprise, it seems wonderful that the rush of men with limited capital has not yet been attracted there. A tea estate of 200 acres can be brought into bearing for £3,000, inclusive of everything, and many places carefully worked show a clear margin of £10 to £15 an acre on the year's working. This, if not a sudden gallop to wealth, is a very steady push towards it. There are (and I think this speaks as well as anything) but few cultivated places for sale, but there is no difficulty in getting land suitable for tea, and though, owing to its smallness at present, a young man without capital would have but a poor chance of getting work, it is difficult to imagine a finer outlet for limited capital.

The climate (above 3,000 feet) is perfectly healthy, during several months quite Italian, though trying from the damp during June, July and August. From the hills you get a clear view out to the sea, which probably accounts for the healthy climate, as the sea-breeze blows away all miasma. The scenery is wonderful, miles of grass plateau covered with luxuriant grass, in which any number of cattle can be fed with profit, surrounded and intersected by untold acres of forest. For the last ten years it has



been well known to sportsmen from England, and large bags of bison and deer have been and still are made.

The greatest irrigation work ever undertaken in India, and probably one of the greatest in the world, is being carried out in the hills by the British Government. This is turning a river which flows now into the sea on the western coast, into the dry ground on the east, irrigating considerably over 100,000 acres and turning it from a parched desert into a smiling land of plenty. Some idea of the size of this work may be gathered by the fact that whilst at the dam head across the river the depth will be 160 feet, seven miles back it will still be 100 feet deep. It is no uncommon thing to register six or eight inches of rain in 24 hours during the wet months, and the vastness of the work required to make a dam sufficiently strong is evident. The water is carried through a tunnel bored through the east side of the Western Ghauts, nearly a mile in length, flows into the plains below, and then is carried to Madura, some 60 miles off (famous for its old Hindoo temple), where it is distributed to the cultivators. Although the work will probably cost by the time of its completion close on £1,000,000 sterling, and the water will be let out at a moderate rate, yet it is, I believe, certain to give returns of something like 8 per cent. to the Government, besides making the Madura district, which suffered so frightfully in the awful famine of '76 and '77, almost safe from future visitations of that scourge.

The hills are inhabited by several tribes of hillmen, the majority of whom cultivate patches of forest, felling a new bit yearly and deserting it after one crop, a most frightfully wasteful proceeding, which has been of late years stopped to a great extent by the forest officers. There is a small tribe amongst these called *Pandarens*, of whom little is known. I believe that myself and three other Europeans are the only white people who have ever seen them. This tribe inhabits the jungle tracts to the south of the Peermaad planting district, or about the centre of Travancore, and live entirely on the roots they dig up, fish and wild honey. They never cultivate, as the other hill tribes do, are rarely seen by natives, and never by Europeans. There are probably not over a hundred, all counted. But the wonder is that any have survived. Probably during the very wet weather they get lower down towards the plains, and sleep under sheltering rocks and such like protection. If a shooting camp be

made they will desert that part for years. The only time I ever saw them was on a shooting expedition about Christmas time two years ago. We—that is, my two friends, my wife, with her hill pony, and myself—had got to our camping ground long in front of the camp, and whilst waiting heard voices. We sat quite still, and presently along an elephant path a whole family of two men, two women and three children came by. My friend, who knew some of the hill dialects, questioned them, and though they were much frightened, they gave intelligent answers. In appearance they were very like the *Urallis*, the ordinary *Malayalee* hillmen in Travancore, and spoke with less of a patois than these men usually do. Their clothes were but scanty, the children having only a curiously-woven circle of green leaves round their waists; but the women wore cloths like the *Tamil* women do, covering their breasts. They said they knew nothing of how the tribe originated, that formerly they did cultivate, but that fever and small-pox had killed so many of the men off that for twenty years they had not done so. They had a few dried crabs and fish, and some fine white flour wrapped in leaves. They were afraid of the village people, as they said they used to ill-treat them and take away their honey and other little stores. They were not afraid of us, though they had never seen a white man before, but they must have been more alarmed than they appeared, for although we promised them clothes and salt if they would come to the camp next day, they never did so, and in their hurry to get away left behind them a little basket, which evidently belonged to one of the ladies, as it contained a small box with a little looking-glass in it, showing that she was a true daughter of Eve. The flour, which with fish forms their principal article of food, is entirely collected from the head of a species of wild palm, which, when cut down, split open and dried, gives a fine white flour. Each tree will yield five to eight pounds of this flour, but after being thus beheaded it dies. Luckily there are a great many of these trees about, and the *Pandarens* are few. Occasionally they snare an ibex or a monkey, setting lines for them in their runs, monkeys having, as is well known, regular runs along the jungle trees, just as deer have on the hills. The most ridiculous stories have been told about these poor people. I have heard natives say that they would kill any villager if they caught him, and that they are little deformed dwarfs 40 to 45

inches high ; that they wear no clothes at all, and hibernate like bears all through the wet weather. Even Europeans often draw on their imagination when talking of them. I have several times come across their little huts on the banks of the river, a simple lean-to, generally on the very brink of the water, with wild plantain leaves for a roof, and a small hole scooped out in the ground and filled with dry grass as a bed, so they have some idea of comfort—but, as far as that goes, so has the field-mouse. The other hill tribes are much more civilized ; they get the land on a sort of feudal tenure—that is, they have to work for the state, at a nominal rate, when required. There are certainly five different races, only one of which talks *Malayalim*, the language of Travancore, and these keep only along the Perriar river. East of this all the tribes talk *Tamil*, and they say that they came up formerly in times of dearth to snatch a living on the jungle produce, and then settled down there. They are of an independent spirit, and invaluable to the sportsman, being very good trackers of game. They make the most wonderful little house of the bamboo and other giant grasses, which grow in profusion in the wilds, but they will rarely do any other work. About September, when the crops come in, they grow fat, but eat it all up like mice, and by the time the rains begin, in June, are often in a very deplorable state. They then borrow at an exorbitant rate, for the native money-lender can give many points to his European *confrère*, and often a very large proportion of their small crop is taken by these insatiable cormorants for a loan equalling perhaps 10s. English money.

I wonder how many people there are in India who have any idea of the wealth of Travancore in the matter of timber. Sawyers are conservative, and if you put them to saw timber in any hundred acres of untouched forest, will in a brief space declare it is all finished ; that is because they know about ten trees that their ancestors have always sawn, and of which about one-third are rather inferior. As a matter of fact there are probably about fifty kinds in any fair forest that make excellent timber. But I suppose that next to breaking their caste, to make them touch wood that they have not been shown by their fathers to be good trees, is the cruellest thing you can do to them, and nothing will teach them that there are more than these kinds of any use. There are in Travancore some four hundred different trees, and I

do not suppose that any one (not in the Forest Department) knows more than twenty of them. The hillmen are just as ignorant ; in fact their knowledge extends only to what they call good honey trees, *i.e.*, those that the bees select for their hive, and these, of course, except those favoured by the big bee, which bites most disagreeably, are only hollow ones. This big bee, called in Ceylon the *Bambara* bee, has, I believe, been captured and taken to Europe, but I never heard if anything came of the experiment.

The wealth of Travancore, as may be gathered from these remarks about the forests, is enormous. Probably nowhere out of Burmah is there such a stock of timber as here, the only, but great, drawback being the difficulty of getting it to the coast, as but few of the rivers (until they get out of the teak districts) are suitable for the floating of big logs. Blackwood, ebony and sandal wood are monopolies, and, with the new *régime* of forestry now started, will probably increase the revenue largely ; though probably it would pay far better to do away with the monopoly system altogether, for it is at best but a primitive sort of political economy. Few of the many other useful trees are exported, and tons of good timber decay, without being of use to any one.

Instead of a national debt, Travancore has a national credit of many *crores* of rupees, and every year shows a surplus. Nor are the peasants heavily taxed. In a way, too, stimulus is given to European capital being brought into the country, and such industries as paper-making, cotton mills, and plumbago mining, which is now being undertaken, have been backed up substantially.

There is a standing army of some 2,000 men, all composed of descendants of that race who, by their tactics, were the only ones who defeated the Maharatta Tiger in the raids which he made on all sides, during the last century, nominally in the interests of Mahometanism. This force is officered by Europeans, and now does little else but attend sentry-goes and parades on state occasions.

Near Trevandrum is the military cantonment of the only British force, now reduced to part of a regiment of Madras infantry, but formerly boasting its artillery, horse and foot. Since the beginning of the century, however, there has not been, nor is there likely to be again, any need for suppressive force. The sword has been turned into a reaping-hook, and there can be little

left but a dim tradition of deeds of daring handed down to the present generation.

None the less, in case of an European power attacking India, there is nothing to prevent a gunboat sweeping down, sacking the ports and capital, and getting away again before troops could be put into motion. The chief Conservator of Forests is the only big official in Quilon, and he together with an European firm and a few officers of the regiment make up the whole white population.

Alleppey, the most northerly town of importance, is also the principal shipping port of the state, and is protected by a curious mud bank some three miles long and half a mile wide, which shifts in a most extraordinary way from year to year. Thus, if opposite the shipping pier one year, you may be quite confident it will be four or five miles north or south the next. It rarely goes more than eight miles either way, but is never stationary. No expert has ever yet been able to give the *raison d'être* of its existence, though numberless theories have been started. One thing is quite certain, the mud contains a large proportion of oily matter, for in the monsoon, with the sea outside running mountains high, ships can anchor on the bank of mud and take in cargo with impunity.

South of Alleppey are the curious little scraps of British territory called Anjengo and Tangaucherry. They are a very sore spot to the Travancoreans, for were they not British, the duty on tobacco and other contraband articles would increase greatly. When arranging for the land on which the great Perriar irrigation work is placed, Travancore asked for the two places in exchange, and the British Government would not have objected, but that the inhabitants to a man petitioned against their being removed from the benign rule of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen Empress. No wonder these gentry like it; the places being too small for a preventative force to be kept, they can ply their little games undisturbed.

The Maharajah and princes live principally in the fort at Travandrum, which, however, has nothing in the way of architecture to distinguish it. And even the old massive walls are disfigured by embellishments of the latest style of Cockney architecture. I was horrified to see that one of the old gateways, which at any rate had the merit of simplicity and was in keeping with the rest,

had been pulled down, and a monstrous thing of red brick with an arch faced with white stone or lime erected in its place, very much what you would see at the entrance to "Laurel Grove," or "Orange Blossom" Cottage at 'Ampstead'Eath. And this takes away much of the mysterious glamour which should surround the home of Oriental potentates.

There is a fine museum here, which is well filled with specimens of the trees, grasses, jungle products, snakes and insects of Travancore. Many entirely new specimens of every kind have been found and classified by those connected with it, whilst the Maharajah has been liberal with funds in the aid of science. The state is enormously wealthy, and besides all its invested money, there is supposed to be in the fort a huge well, lined and filled with all sorts of precious stones and metals. This is secured by an iron door with seven locks, and seven officers of state each hold a key, nor can the monster safe be unlocked unless the seven keys are used at the same time. This reads like an Arabian night's story, but is, I believe, really authentic. However, it has never been my good fortune, much as I have wished it, to see the classic spot. There seems good reason to think that it would be hopeless to find gold enough to keep up a gold currency in India, so wonderful is the way that metal is absorbed by the natives. On a *fête* day I have often seen hundreds, I may say thousands, of women and girls, walking about with necklaces made entirely of gold coins from the time of the first Dutch and Portuguese settlement, down to our present English sovereign, strung at haphazard together, and forming a circlet often six inches in depth. True, many of these are valuable, and are handed down from generation to generation, witness the antiquity of many of the coins. But still the population increases enormously, and not one of the weaker sex of the better class can move out on festal days without nearly a queen's ransom on her neck.

The actual coin of the country is curious. Besides special ones struck on great occasions, such as the succession of a new Maharajah to the throne, or something of the kind, there is the *chuckran*, a little flat coin with Chinese-like hieroglyphics in silver or gold, the former worth about a halfpenny and the latter about a shilling. These are little bits of metal about the circumference of a pin. Then there is the *firnam*, about the size of a threepenny-bit, worth twopence, and the *cash*, a copper coin about the size

of the *chuckran* and worth the sixteenth part of one. All these coins are made in the mint by a man who, with a heavy hammer with these hieroglyphics on it, strikes the coin while in a soft state. The result is that it is impossible to get two stamped alike. The whole of the state accounts are kept in *firmams*, that being the registered coin of the country, corresponding to our sovereign as a standard. I regret to say that rupees and half rupees have been introduced lately, but these are a snare and delusion, and not worthy of the old coins of Travancore.

This article has, I think, shown that there is still in India a corner left, which has kept up some of the remembrances of former times, and is still worthy the attention of visitors in search of the quaint and interesting, as well as of those who are anxious to invest capital.

The only other articles I have read on this interesting state have been written solely from a sportsman's point of view, which, good though it may be in moderation, can scarcely be called the *summum bonum* of life. Indeed, with the yearly increasing number of sportsmen and would-be sportsmen, and the reckless massacre of females and young, which one hears of only too often, unless game laws and close seasons can be shortly started, the wild inhabitants of these splendid shooting grounds will become like the American bison—a thing of the past.

S. M. D.

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## A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),  
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE  
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER XIV.

"IT WILL KILL HER!"

"It will kill my mother. For myself, I could bear it; but if there is any truth in the ghastly story, it will kill my poor mother."

"Not so bad as that, I hope, Mr. Stanmer, for I very much fear that the ghastly story is true."

"What has induced the woman to keep quiet all these years?"

"It's difficult to say why she has done so. There's a screw loose in her antecedents, I imagine. Smith, the solicitor who has been making inquiries about the Arthur Ogilvie who we presume to have been your father, merely baldly stated that Mrs. Ogilvie had left her husband when her son was a baby, taking that baby with her. I asked '*why* she had left her husband,' and he told me 'that point was immaterial to the case.' He said he could prove the marriage, and said there had never been a divorce."

Arthur Stanmer shuddered.

"If the story is true, my poor mother is not my father's wife," he said bitterly. "And she always believed him to be the soul of honour."

He must have married her under the impression that his first wife was dead."

"She is still alive?"

"She is, and the son also. Smith says he has been a bit of a scapegrace, but is settling down quietly now. He has been an actor, but now he is a traveller for a wine merchants' firm."

"Good heaven! I know him, then," Arthur broke in. "Does he know yet who his father was?"

"No, Smith has not enlightened his clients yet; the mother knows that he has got a clue to her late husband's identity, but Smith is waiting to see you before he puts the power of full knowledge and information in their hands. He and I both hope that an arrangement may be come to quietly by which your mother may be spared the blow of hearing the truth."

"That will be impossible, utterly impossible. If this Mr. Ogilvie is my father's eldest son, born in wedlock, I am a bastard and a pauper. My mother must know the truth, all the world will know it; she is one of the proudest, as well as one of the purest women that ever lived. It will kill her."

"Upon my word, I feel disposed to attempt to negotiate for secrecy," the lawyer exclaimed; "the young fellow has never been led to expect either money or property. Something might be done possibly to effect a compromise."

"Is it likely that either the wife or the son will give up their rights? Moreover, I wouldn't lend myself to any deception. Tell Mr. Smith that he is at liberty to put his clients in full possession of the facts of the case without delay. The crash must come, and as it's inevitable, the sooner it comes the better. Thank God, I have not brought any one into the disgrace which will attach to me when the hideous truth is made public. Thank God, no loving woman will have to blush for me and herself through any action of mine."

"My dear fellow, you take a distorted and exaggerated view of things." The lawyer spoke feelingly, he had been the friend as well as the legal adviser of Arthur's father, and the bitterness of spirit which possessed the young man now hurt the old man on that dead friend's account.

"I can't well exaggerate the shame and misery and poverty that will be the portion of my mother and myself for the future. I know what you're thinking; you think I am censuring my father's memory. Remember, before you blame me for doing so, that I am my mother's son also. Think of the blot this will be on her good name and fame."

"Every one will understand that Mrs. Stanmer is absolutely innocent, absolutely without reproach."

"I know she is all that," Arthur cried hotly; "but how will

that help her? She will be subject to the thousand and one nameless slights that are always freely offered to those who have to step down from the top of the social ladder to its lowest rung. And the woman who will take her place and reign at Dene Prior as the widow of the late Arthur Stanmer will be sympathized with as one who has too long been defrauded of her due. My poor mother! It will kill her!"

"She has more grit than you give her credit for. I don't believe she will bow her stately head for a moment; she will be as much honoured as ever, and perhaps better loved for this undeserved trouble which has fallen upon her."

"I shall take her away at once; no one shall gloat over our downfall. Good heavens! I am forgetting my position already. I have not the means of taking her away."

"Your mother's own money is strictly settled upon her."

"What does that amount to? A beggarly four hundred a year; just enough to keep her in that sort of genteel poverty which she might have had the courage to battle through when she was younger, but which will speedily wear her out now. As for myself, I have my arms and legs, and failing all else I can break stones on the road, I suppose."

"I thought he would have borne it better; I hoped he would have shown a brave front," the lawyer thought pitifully. "It's a bad blow, a very bad blow, poor fellow; but he's hand-free and heart-free, luckily, and with his good looks and address he may marry money if he isn't too infernally proud."

Arthur Stanmer had been lingering on day after day in town, hoping against hope as the hours went by that this claim which was being set up for a Mrs. Ogilvie and her son might turn out to be a fraudulent one. This hope was over now. His lawyers had been convinced against their will that when his father had gone through the marriage ceremony with his mother, a first legal wife had been in existence—was in existence still, worse luck. And worse luck still, there was an elder brother, a rightful heir, living.

It was useless staying in town any longer, but it was an awful alternative to have to go home and break the appalling news to his mother. How could he do it? How could he bear to do it and live? the poor young fellow asked himself a hundred times as he made his miserable preparations to go back to the home

which he had left with such high hopes of happiness and Belle. He was at such a low ebb that he felt mournfully glad that he had not answered that kind letter of hers which his mother had forwarded to him from Dene Prior. On the very day he had received it, and just as he had been on the point of starting off for Blessington Terrace to plead his cause—which he felt intuitively was already more than half won—the first note of alarm as to his legitimate right to the name of Stanmer and the Dene Prior property had been sounded. He had then determined to wait before he either wrote to or saw Belle; to wait until all disgraceful doubts should be cleared up. When he thought that the fuller knowledge for which he had waited was *this*, that he was a “bastard and a pauper,” as he called himself unmercifully, he nearly went mad.

Once or twice he nearly relented towards himself, nearly made up his mind to go to Belle and tell her all the grim facts of the case. Then after each relapse into this relenting mood he became more inflexible than before. He would not stoop to ask for the love and pity of a girl whom he had condemned unjustly, he felt now. Whatever she did, whether she smiled upon him or frowned upon him, her action would be equally galling to him in his present raw and smarting frame of mind.

A fierce wave of jealousy swept over his soul when he remembered how the handsome vagabond who now turned out to be his brother had stolen kisses from Belle's lips, which he (Arthur) had always held sacred. Supposing that through the irony of fate Belle should ever—but, no, he wouldn't allow himself to suppose anything so revolting! Then immediately he relaxed, and “allowed” himself to think, “Supposing he offers himself to Belle now, and she, dazzled by the position he can give her, accepts him? He will steal everything from me—my inheritance, my name, my honour, and my love!”

He had his better moods at times, and while they lasted he would nearly allow his impulses to take him to Belle Warrener. But before he obeyed this better and broader impulse the narrower suspicion that Belle would not care for a man “who had not even a name to offer her” stepped in, and he succumbed to the temptation of believing that she would despise and reject him.

“Let there be no delay about it. The crash must come; let

it come at once. Tell those people that my mother and I will leave Dene Prior within a week," he said to his solicitor before going home, and the man of business replied :

"You are right not to procrastinate and delay matters ; it would do no good. But you had better try to establish friendly relations with this man, who, after all, is your brother. Don't treat him as an enemy before you know that he means to be one to you. It is not his fault, remember, that he is your father's eldest son."

"I knocked him down some time ago, when he was masquerading as a beggar, and I caught him insulting a lady I know. He won't forgive me that in a hurry. What is the mother like? Good heavens! it's maddening to think of her in my mother's place."

"I believe she is a very respectable old lady now, whatever she may have been when she left her home and her husband. They know nothing yet, remember. Smith is giving you time to break it to your mother before he acquaints them with their rise in life."

"The loss of my belief in my father's honour and integrity is worse to me than the loss of Dene Prior."

"Don't lose that belief yet. It will probably turn out that he married your mother under the impression that the first wife was dead."

"We can arrive at what his impression was now. It seems to me that he would not have kept the matter so dark if he really knew she was dead, or if it really was a marriage."

"I am afraid there is no doubt as to the marriage."

"It will kill my mother," poor Arthur said hopelessly, and there being nothing reassuring to say on this point, the man of business said nothing.

Meanwhile Belle waited for an answer to her letter of explanation, which never came.

She did not give way to the soul-sickening and lowering yearning to see the beloved object in which Sylvia was indulging freely at the time. Belle struggled to keep her love (it was not infatuation) in check, as it did not appear that Arthur reciprocated it sufficiently to trust and believe her. At the same time she could not help thinking of him a great deal too much for her own comfort. She pictured him down at Dene Prior giving fond looks

and words to the distinguished-looking girl whom she had seen for a minute or two on the platform, and who she knew from her step-mother was still a guest at Dene Prior. She admitted honestly that this girl, this Rose Davenport, had beauty and breeding, and that any man might be forgiven for succumbing to her charms. At the same time she felt bitterly hurt and disappointed that Arthur should have done so, and the thought of going back to Prior Common and being a compulsory witness of their happiness was sadly distasteful to her.

The opportunity which Lily wanted of prettily pleading Sylvia's desire for the wedding to be delayed with Mr. Christopher was not long in coming.

She was at home alone one afternoon when he called. The wedding day was fixed for that day week, and he was not unnaturally ill-pleased that his bride-elect was not at home to receive him, as he had prepared her for his coming some hours before by a note and a posy of orchids, tied with the palest heliotrope ribbon streamers.

However, his ill-temper abated a little when Lily, looking her fairest, rose to receive him.

"Mamma and Sylvia and Belle are enterprising, and have gone out on a round of calls. I am lazy, and stayed at home—to see you."

Lily was feeling intensely well satisfied with herself this afternoon. Her black bengaline skirt was admirably cut, and the pale heliotrope silk shirt, with its cross-over folds, was a distinct success. The orchids, with their streamers, that just matched her shirt, stood in a silver vase on a little table by her side.

"I dressed up to them, you see," she said, touching a petal lightly with her finger. "It was such an opportunity, and as Sylvia didn't want to take it I thought you wouldn't be angry with me for peacocking myself with her flowers until she comes in."

"Angry—with *you*. A man must be ill-conditioned indeed who could be angry with *you*. But I must say"—he plumped down ponderously into a very well carved but shaky Belgian oak chair as he spoke, and she could not help smiling at the thought of how funny he would look if the seat collapsed, and his body went down, while his head and feet remained in the air—"I must

say that I am getting a little tired of Sylvia's forgetfulness. Want of memory in a young person is a grievous fault. I told her in a note, which I presume she received this morning with the orchids, that I should call at four o'clock. It is now four exactly, and I find *she* has gone out. Sylvia's forgetfulness or indifference, whichever it is, annoys me."

He looked steadily at Lily, and Lily withdrew her fond gaze from the contemplation of her own remarkably pretty, well hosed and shod feet, and looked steadily at him as she answered :

"Sylvia went out on purpose. She wants to 'get used to the thought of being Mrs. Christopher,' she says, quietly and gradually. Seeing you upsets her, she says. She would get used to the idea of being married much better if she didn't see you for six months—so she tells mamma and me. I think I should prefer the other plan of getting used to the idea, and that is seeing you constantly. But Sylvia and I are very different."

He was bursting with rage and mortification as he listened to her. But it was not her fault that he was being thrust into this odious position. Distinctly it was not her fault. She was a thousand times more womanly, gentler and sweeter than Sylvia.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SYLVIA'S SACRIFICE.

"SYLVIA must clearly understand, once for all, that I am not going to submit to her absurd—her insultingly absurd condition. I should be the laughing-stock of all my friends. Unless she is ready and willing to behave like a reasonable woman, and marry me, as arranged, this day week, the wedding shall be put off for ever."

"She is very foolish to lose such a chance ; any other girl would prize it too highly to risk losing it for a mere silly fad," Lily answered, with just the right touch of sympathy. It did not express pity for him. To pity he would have strongly objected. He, a rich, well-reputed, thoroughly honourable and respectable citizen and gentleman, was undoubtedly no object of pity. At the same time, it was very soothing to be told by such a fair and sweet young woman as Lily, that any other girl than her less lovely sister would prize the chance of marrying him too highly to risk losing it.



"Tell me more about your house in Devonshire," she said presently; "I don't suppose I shall ever see it now, but I like hearing about it."

"Why should you suppose you will never see it?"

"Why? If Sylvia sticks to her condition and you stick to yours, I suppose you will never care to speak to any of us again. Poor mamma and I will be the sufferers."

She spoke of the possible suffering which might be in store with smiling affability. He told himself, "upon his solemn honour, that he had never met with a sweeter-tempered woman in his life." Aloud he said:

"You may rest assured that, however unreasonable Sylvia is, I shall not visit her offences on you. I shall not desert you, Lily, though you don't seem destined to be my sister." Then he went on to tell, in the most vivid language he had at command, of the beauties and spaciousness of his house and gardens in the middle of Devonshire. But diffuse as he was, Lily failed to gather any very clear idea of it from his description. However, he liked to talk about it, so she listened with many appreciative smiles, while he rambled on in happy forgetfulness of his grievance against his capricious Sylvia.

He remembered this, though, when, after a time, Mrs. Gould and Belle Warrener came home without Sylvia. The latter had rebelled against going home to meet her liege lover, and had very openly declared her intention of going off to see old Mrs. Ogilvie, to the infinite distress of her mother. Mrs. Gould refrained from making him acquainted with this crowning piece of evil-doing, but that Sylvia should not have come home, though there was a chance of finding him there, offended him sufficiently.

"My time is of too much importance to be wasted in waiting about to see a young lady who seems to be ignorant of the merest rudiments of politeness," he said, bringing his air of heaviest displeasure to bear on Mrs. Gould, who was guileless in the matter. "I meant to have asked you all to dine with me at the 'Métropole,' and have already secured a box for 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,' but as Sylvia has behaved in this unaccountably disagreeable way, the box will be wasted."

"Sylvia is more than irritating," Mrs. Gould murmured apologetically; "I can't tell you how much I feel ashamed of her conduct."

"You may well be—you may well be," he replied loftily, and for a moment or two Mrs. Gould gave way to natural feeling, hated him, and understood poor Sylvia's repugnance to him. Then she exorcised the demon of natural feeling, as conventional, ambitious and poverty-stricken mothers are compelled to do continually, remembered his well-to-do condition and Dick Ogilvie's impecuniosity, and accepted the unjust rebuke meekly.

He said good-bye to them soon after this, and when he was gone, Lily resumed her reading of one of Rudyard Kipling's stories of harmoniously happy and perfectly pure married life.

"You might as well tell me what he said before we came in," Mrs. Gould said fretfully. "You are so apathetic, Lily. The well-being of the whole family is at stake, and you don't even take the trouble to tell me how Mr. Christopher bore it."

"He said that unless the wedding comes off this day week, as arranged, he won't marry her at all," Lily said sweetly.

"Lily! did you try to move him to a less stern determination? You apparently don't realize what it means. If she marries him you and I can go abroad for a time, let this house and retrench, and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that the expenses I've incurred this summer for her *trousseau* and other things are not thrown away. But if the wedding is broken off irrevocably, I shall be terribly crippled, terribly!"

"I can't make Sylvia marry him next week, nor can I make him wait for Sylvia six months, mamma. If I were you I wouldn't trouble myself about it yet. If the worst comes, it won't be such a very bad worst. We can all go abroad while you retrench. Dinard is a lovely place and the climate is neither too hot nor too cold, and it's cheap. Or, Davos Platz might do for us for a time; the climate there is more bracing."

"Why have you been getting up this information about cheap continental places?" her mother asked.

"Sylvia put it into my head the other day when she said she meant to marry Dick Ogilvie. I thought it would be better to have them poor away somewhere in the Pyrenees, than poor at Peckham, or in any London locality, where we should be liable to see them continually. Now, you see my information comes in handy for you, if the worst comes to the worst, and you have to break up this house."

"He was going to settle a thousand a year pin-money on her and much more at his death," Mrs. Gould moaned with tears.

"Was he? the dear old thing! Sylvia is a goose! I would give up a thousand Dick Ogilvies for a thousand a year."

"Oh! Lily, Lily! why wasn't it you instead of Sylvia?"

"I can't imagine why it wasn't; I'm much better-looking than she is, and better tempered, and better principled. I never wanted Dick Ogilvie," Lily said reflectively. "It's annoying that we shall lose 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' to-night through Sylvia's silliness."

"Everything is annoying."

"Well, I don't know about that, mamma. Sylvia has disappointed you a little, but she is not your only daughter."

A little sparkle of exultation came into Lily's eyes as she said this. Before her mother could make up her mind as to what it would be most discreet to reply, Lily had risen leisurely and got as far as the door.

"I will leave you to tell Sylvia what Mr. Christopher said, mamma; it will come better from you than from me. Only make her understand that he quite meant it: if she doesn't marry him this day week he will break it off altogether."

"Are they alone? is any one here?" Sylvia asked hurriedly of the servant who opened the door to her, about half-an-hour before dinner that day.

"Your mamma and the young ladies are upstairs dressing, miss; there's no one in the drawing-room. Mr. Christopher has been here, miss, but I suppose he got tired of waiting for you, for he's gone."

Sylvia breathed a short sigh of relief and ran upstairs. She made a momentary pause at her mother's door, then thought better of entering apparently, and went on to Belle's room. Belle met her with an unsmiling face. To this unspoken reproof Sylvia retorted impatiently:

"I suppose I am in everybody's black books, am I not?"

"If you had seen your mother's distress when you left us, saying you were going to the Ogilvies', you wouldn't speak so lightly about it."

"I didn't say I was going to *the* Ogilvies'; I said I was going to see *Mrs.* Ogilvie."

"That's mere straw-splitting; she knew what you meant. Really I believe it will break your mother's heart if you resume your acquaintance with that man."

"Don't speak of him as 'that man,' Belle; it's such an insultingly disparaging way; it stings me like a cut from a sharp whip. It makes me long to fly to him and tell him that, however much other people despise and look down upon him, I love him better than ever for it."

"My dear Sylvia, you couldn't take a surer way of cooling his ardour for you than by telling him that other people look down upon and despise him and that you know it. Why, a man would be a saint to stand it, and you must admit that he is not that, even if he is not such a sinner as I think him."

"Would it surprise you very much to hear that I didn't go to the Ogilvies' after all this afternoon? Mother's last look stopped me. She didn't look cross, but so wretched. I went into the Grove and wandered about Whiteley's."

"You dear girl!" Belle said heartily. "Your mother will be so happy."

"Staying away from the Ogilvies' doesn't make me like marrying Mr. Christopher a bit better."

"I can't regret that. I think you would be very wrong to marry Mr. Christopher."

"Look here, Belle; I would rather be actively miserable than monotonously miserable. If I am cut off from Dick I shall marry Mr. Christopher."

"He's the lesser evil of the two," Belle said, and Sylvia, not meeting with the verbal opposition she had anticipated, went off to dress.

Ann was in a singularly grim and silent mood this evening, but just as Sylvia was dressed and leaving the room, the woman opened her lips with a snap and said:

"I have had notice to leave, Miss Sylvia."

"Notice to leave? Why?"

The dinner bell rang at the moment and Sylvia was glad to escape from the sound of the nasty laugh which was the only answer Ann vouchsafed to the question.

"I didn't go to Mrs. Ogilvie's," Sylvia found time to whisper to her mother before they sat down to dinner. "Don't look so sad, mother. I didn't go; I wouldn't vex you so."

"You *can* make me so happy, you have it in your power," Mrs. Gould whispered in reply.

When they got away to the drawing-room Lily drew her chair apart from the others into the bay window at the western end of the room, where she could get all the light that was left to fall upon Rudyard Kipling's pages.

"Have you told Sylvia about the loss we have had?" she asked before she settled down to her pleasant task.

"What loss?" Sylvia asked quickly. She hoped for one wild moment that Mr. Christopher had resigned her.

"The loss of 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.' Mr. Christopher had a box for her to-night, and as she's the most interesting woman in London—at any rate the one most talked about just now—I consider not seeing her a distinct and heavy loss."

Lily made her complaint smilingly and sweetly.

"You could have gone without me," Sylvia said carelessly.

"Have you told her what Mr. Christopher said, mamma?"

"Not yet, Lily dear."

"You had better do it to-night, I think; there is not much time to lose," Lily said. Then she leant back and surrendered herself entirely to the absorbing interest of the story.

"I will speak to you up in my room before you go to bed to-night, Sylvia," her mother said in a low tone. She was feeling very kindly and gently to this difficult child of hers this night. Sylvia's confession of having been touched into submission to her mother's wishes by the sadness in her mother's face, had softened Mrs. Gould greatly towards her youngest daughter. Perhaps a part of the softening was due to the fact that she had for the first time permitted the suspicion to enter her mind that, underlying all Lily's sweetness, placidity and good-temper, there was a strong vein of selfishness and indifference to others. Mrs. Gould could not blind herself to the fact that Lily was perfectly callous to her (Mrs. Gould's) anxieties, and was already calculating in a cool, calm, ladylike way upon the chances of stepping into her sister's shoes with Mr. Christopher. Accordingly she unconsciously brought far heavier pressure to bear upon Sylvia by being extremely tender and gentle, than if she had been severe and authoritative.

"Come and let me know the worst at once, mother dear; don't keep me on tenter-hooks till I am going to bed," she pleaded;

and together the mother and daughter went out of the drawing-room.

Lily lifted her eyes from her book for a moment as the door closed behind them, and said to Belle :

"I hope Sylvia wont shilly-shally."

"I hope she won't, for her own sake," Belle replied.

"Yes, and for all our sakes. It will be much pleasanter when there is no longer the faintest possible shadow of doubt as to what she means to do."

"Lily gave Mr. Christopher your message, Sylvia, and as I expected, he won't hear of the six months. It must be this day week, or——never!" Mrs. Gould made the last word more impressive by breaking into a really uncontrollable sob.

"Mother, mother, don't take it like that; if it's never it will be all the happier for me."

"I am so hampered, so fettered," Mrs. Gould went on sobbing.

"He has been so good to me, so generous. He has promised—but it's no use telling you, poor child! If you feel you *cannot* marry him, I must face what is before me as best I can."

"Tell me what you were going to say when you checked yourself. You don't—surely you don't owe him money."

"He has promised to free me from all my pecuniary difficulties on your wedding-day. He put it with great delicacy and consideration. He said it should be *your* gift to me."

"The wedding shall be this day week, mother. I won't go back to the drawing-room. You tell them."

She kissed her mother and went up to her room, where she locked the door against Ann, and tried to lock her heart against all loving thoughts of the man she was *not* going to marry, and against all feelings of loathing and revolt about the man to whom she would belong irrevocably by that time next week.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A COMFORTER.

WHEN Arthur Stanmer re-entered Dene Prior after an absence of nearly three weeks, his servants might have been forgiven for taking him for merely the spectre of the fine young English gentleman who had gone off so jubilantly to woo and win his love only the other day as it seemed.



The fact is he knew now that all hope of his being proved to be the eldest legitimate son, and, therefore, the heir of the late Arthur Stanmer, was over now. The claims of the Ogilvies had been found to be incontestable, and he had come down to break the horrible truth to his mother, and to take her away from Dene Prior for ever.

It was an awful moment for him, that in which he entered the home that was no longer his with the shadow of dishonour upon him. Worse than this, the shadow of dishonour was upon the memory of the father of whom he had been so proud, and on the life of the dearly-loved haughty-souled mother who had always gloried in the pride of place to which she had attained through her husband. If he could only have lost Dene Prior without losing his right to still respect and honour his father above and beyond all other men as he hitherto had done, he would have counted himself happy. But as it was, this gruesome truth was driven home pitilessly to his heart. His father had carelessly contracted new holy and vital obligations, without taking the trouble to ascertain whether the old equally holy and vital ones were cancelled or not. That he should have done this when the honour of such a woman as his (Arthur's) mother was involved, nearly broke his heart. The loss of Dene Prior was bitter enough, but it was as nothing compared to the bitterness he tasted in knowing that through his father's carelessness his mother had never been a wife, and he himself was "a bastard," as he had harshly put it to his own lawyer.

He had given many weary days and nights to the consideration of how he could best break it to his mother. She was not a woman to be put off with any lightly slurred or evasively sketchy statement. Where her rights and his were concerned she would insist upon knowing the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He had pictured her attitude of fine scorn while she still disbelieved the claims of "those Ogilvies" a hundred times. He did not dare to picture her abasement when it was borne in upon her that those claims were well grounded.

It seemed to him that there was a significantly solemn air of hush and suppression about the house as he came into it, and for a few wild moments he thought that the "other side" had broken faith, and allowed a rumour of the hideous truth to get bruited abroad before the time which had been agreed upon by



the legal advisers of the opposing families. But this nauseating dread was soon dispelled. The household still recognized him as its rightful master—how he hated posing as such now that he knew how false his claims were! but he did it for his mother's sake—and the air of hush and suppression was fully and painfully accounted for when Rose Davenport met him with the words:

"Your mother has not been very well for the last few days. We are keeping the house very quiet, as she sleeps badly at night, and is dozing just now. Seeing you when she wakes will do her so much good."

He had strung himself up to the determination to tell his mother this much at least, that they must leave Dene Prior at once—this night. He chafed against the delay of an hour or two even. He longed, poor fellow, to be able to pour out some of his bruised, battered heart to his mother, on whose sympathy he could rely through everything. Her illness fretted rather than frightened him. It was just enough to make it impossible for him to disturb her with his tale of ruin, but if it had been anything serious Miss Davenport would not have kept him in the dark.

He joined Rose Davenport an hour later on in a little octagon room, which "the family" were fond of dining in when they were alone. Rose's hands and taste had made lovely flowers and branches seem to grow from the mantelpiece and round table at which they dined.

"I would have had some of the gold plate out to do honour to your return, but your mother was not well enough to be troubled about details to-day, and I dared not take it on myself to use it without her sanction or yours," she said, as she sat down facing him in her composed practical way, sweeping all sentimental or frivolously coquettish possibilities aside by the gracefully quiet way in which she expressed that it was inevitable they should dine together without a third at table, and that there was nothing more in it than if they had been a couple of men.

"Fortunately for me I can dine off other plates than those made of gold," he said dismally, then seeing that the young lady who had been making an effort to abolish all awkwardness and embarrassment from their enforced *tête-à-tête* gave him a quick glance of affectionate resentment, he added:

"I have had some bad news since I have been away. For several days I have been dreading breaking it to my mother. Now it adds to my distress to find that she is too ill to make it safe she should hear now what it is inevitable she must hear later on."

Rose Davenport looked at him searchingly. She longed with all her dear womanly heart to comfort this man, whom, against her will and his own, she had learnt to love. But until he professed his confidence, she could not offer him comfort.

"For the first time in my life I wish I were not a woman. If I were a man friend you would tell me what is troubling you."

She had to say it quickly, for the butler was back in the room even as she spoke, and Arthur was unable to answer her.

But by-and-bye, after he had been up to look at and kiss his mother, who had woke up from her restless sleep, but was too drowsy to say more to him than, "Dear boy! so glad," before she went off into a doze again, Arthur Stanmer reverted to her unanswered remark :

"I can't wish you anything but what you are, and that is the kindest and most sensible friend a man can have. Something is troubling me ; you must know what it is in a day or two ; I may as well tell you now at once. I am not a miserable pretender, Rose, but an unintentional one, but not the less miserable for that. My father married twice ! His son by the first wife is living and is the owner of Dene Prior."

She crossed the space between them swiftly and held out her hands to him. There was nothing sensational or hysterical in the gesture. As soon as he had grasped them as a man is apt to grasp hands that are held out to him in his hour of need, she took them back into her own keeping and sat down, saying quietly :

"It's hard to fall into the place of second son after having believed yourself to be the eldest all your life ; but, in giving up Dene Prior, you don't give up everything. You have your friends and your mother and, above all, yourself left to you still. I have always known you to be a clever man, Mr. Stanmer, and I have always felt a little sorry that something didn't occur to stimulate you to exert yourself to make a name independent of Dene Prior. Now something has occurred, and you will make your name sound ! Tell me you will ?"

"I haven't even a name," he muttered dejectedly; and then brokenly, but in a way that left no doubt upon her mind as to its heart-breaking truthfulness, he told her the whole story.

"You may find out in some way or other that there's a mistake about the worst part of it. I feel sure you will if you try hard, and you must never cease trying, and I will help you just as if I were a man friend," she said, more cheerfully than she felt; but his downcast looks nerved her to the friendly task of pulling him out of his slough of despond.

"There is nothing left to find out; it's all horribly clear," he said moodily. "What do you mean by the worst part of it?"

"It may turn out—it will turn out, I'm sure—that your father had been misled into thinking the first wife dead. *That* is the worst part of it in your eyes, I know, that he should have married your mother before he felt *sure*."

"God bless you, Rose," he said heartily. She had gone to the root of his bitterest grief. She had done him the generous justice of feeling that he prized the honour of his parents before everything in the world. She had given him credit for all that was noblest and most unselfish in his paroxysm of despair. From his heart he blessed her for it, and unconsciously held his head higher again.

After this they spoke freely to one another, and with every word she spoke he realized more and more fully that in this young woman, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a society girl, with a perfect appreciation of her own value as heiress and beauty, as good, true and staunch a friend as a man may ever hope to have here below. Feeling this he came out of the bottomless abyss of misery for a time, until he remembered that he still had the task before him of breaking it to his mother.

"She will bear it better than you think," Rose told him; at the same time she was almost glad to add, "but you must wait for a day till she is stronger."

"It will have to be done in a day or two. I must take her away before those Ogilvies come in and turn us out."

"Don't make up your mind that his hand will be against you, and that it is your duty to your mother and yourself that your hand must be against him. He is your brother after all—your father's son, and will you be angry when I say that he is like you?"

"I know. I have seen him on more than one occasion. He is a good-looking fellow, much better-looking than I am. He has it in everything," he added grimly. "He's legitimate, he's the heir, and he's handsome."

"And don't forget he is your brother into the bargain. Where have you seen him? You haven't told me that."

"I saw him the other night—about three weeks ago—at a smoking concert at the Ramblers.' He sang well; he seemed to be amusing and popular. But I had seen him before that."

"Where?"

He hesitated for a moment or two, love for and loyalty to Belle Warrener battling with his newly-developed friendship for and confidence in Rose. Then he said:

"I won't have any concealments from you; I feel that I can trust you implicitly. When you hear what I have to tell you you will understand why I am not ready to start fraternal relations with Mr. Ogilvie."

Then he told her of his first encounter with Dick the tramp in the water-meadow.

"I can understand your feeling very, very angry. I can understand that you find it hard to forgive, as you are——" She paused to pick out a word that should delicately express to him that she understood what his feelings were about Belle without actually crudely defining them.

"That I am what?"

"Very deeply attached to Miss Warrener—as most people who know her seem to be," she said, colouring a little, for there was a certain amount of pain, well regulated as her pulses were, in speaking of this man's love for another girl; "but when she knows he is your brother she will forgive him for your sake, and then you will forgive him too."

"You speak as if it were possible, in your estimation, that there should be social relations between us."

"Why not? If I suddenly found out that my father had married another wife before he married my mother, and that I had a brother or sister of whom I had never heard before, I shouldn't be angry and want to punish *them* for it. Blood is thicker than water."

He did not like to remind her that the blood which flowed in

the Stanmer veins was a highly superior fluid to that which circulated through the Davenport system.

"I shall go away from here as soon as my mother can be removed ; and I hope I may never hear or see anything that can remind me of Dene Prior again," he said desperately ; and she did what a woman should always do under such circumstances—abstained from arguing, advising and so further aggravating him.

"I will go up and get the latest news of your mother, and bring it to you before I say good-night."

Then she went away, her heart bleeding for the untoward shame, ruin and misery that was being forced upon him, but with a bright, firm look and manner that acted upon him as a tonic. He loved Belle best still in his heart, but how grateful he felt to the girl who was standing shoulder to shoulder with him.

He sat there smoking his cigarette for a long time, waiting for her return with the latest bulletin for 'the night ; and, as he waited, he kept on reminding himself that the butler's attentions were misdirected, as he (Arthur) was no longer master of the house. He could not realize it. That he, Arthur Stanmer, who had been called the young squire for so many years—who seemed to have been founded on such a social rock in the county—should be a nameless outcast, without a penny, in the course of a few days. It was incredible—it was more horrible than the most horrible romance—but it was true, nevertheless.

His thoughts were distracted from the consideration of his own more absolutely personal grievances by Rose Davenport's abrupt re-entrance.

"Your mother is not so well. Will you send for the doctor *at once* ? Stay ; I will tell you what her symptoms are, that you may write them to him, in order that he may come prepared."

"Prepared ? For what ?"

"For her being very ill—for a curious change that has come over her since the doctor saw her last, when he said she was suffering from an attack of influenza. Now she seems to me to be in a high fever, and she is moaning as if she were in great pain. I am so sorry for you—so sorry for you. Do say you're glad I'm here, for I may be of use to her. She is fond of me, and I love

her very much, Mr. Stanmer, in my way, which is not a very demonstrative one."

"She loves you as a daughter ; but I have no right to say anything of that kind to you now."

"The same right as ever. I will not say good-night, for I shall stay up till the doctor has seen her."

"You are my good angel," he said gratefully ; and when he had written his note and despatched it to the doctor, he found himself hungering for her presence again.

*(To be continued.)*

### "Talking Shop."

EVERY woman is supposed to take a delight in seeing or hearing of anything new, whatever form it takes, or however it may be presented to her view. Whether she really does so, or not, is a question, but the fact remains that to nearly all of us the getting of new things, more especially clothes, just now, is a necessity, and has to be gone through, whether we look upon it as a pleasure or a trouble. Very probably also, not only for ourselves do we have to make purchases, but for hosts of relations and country cousins, most of these having a blind faith in all that is sent to them from town, and willing to wear any imaginable article of attire if only it bears upon it the *cachet* of a good London shop. Certainly in this age of luxury our wants seem incessant, and what we look upon as bare necessities our grandmothers counted luxuries. But then, everything is so changed since their days. Imagine the contrast between the shopping of, say, fifty or sixty years ago and the present time. Things are made much easier for us than for them, and our only difficulty is to know where to go, and how to choose among the *embarras de richesse* that is shown us on every side. While our ancestors probably were quite contented with their little shops in the nearest country town, where new fashions would only come down perhaps once or at most twice in the year, and where after due consideration they would buy their one winter or summer gown, which would last them for years, and the same with hats, bonnets, and all their articles of dress. They spent a good deal on them and meant them to last, and they did not go out of fashion, or if they did it mattered not, for they wore them just the same. But we require about a dozen dresses where they only wanted one or two, and it is well for us that our *fin de siècle* shopping is carried out in such a different way to the old-fashioned mode.

Economy of time in these days is a great object to many people, and for these busy ones who find the days all too short for what they have to get through it is a great thing to know



where to go, how to spend their money to the best advantage, sparing themselves as much fatigue and waste of time as possible, and yet feel thoroughly satisfied with all their purchases. For who does not know the weariness of wandering about from shop to shop, until at last we are so tired out with the search that we are fain to take anything that is offered, although we know full well that it will never suit us and is by no means what we really wanted. When one has a long list of purchases that absolutely must be made in the day, ranging from all sorts of household necessities to clothing and wearing apparel of every description for one's self, one's friends, and children of all ages and sizes, there is a vast amount of time saved by doing as much as possible under one roof, and for this sort of shopping stores are the greatest convenience. In former days, except for the village shops, where a little of everything was sold, stores were unknown; and later on one generally associated the name with the idea of provisions, groceries and such like necessary, if rather uninteresting, things. But most of these places now go in as well for millinery, drapery and dressmaking of the very best and most perfect kind, and you are able to fit yourself out from head to foot in a very short time, and satisfy every possible want.

We heard, the other day, that Harrod's stores in the Brompton Road had just opened a new millinery and outfitting department, and that there we should see a wonderful display of all the newest spring and summer fashions, at very reasonable prices. So, armed with a long list of purchases, we went down to examine for ourselves, and see what we could discover. We went straight to the outfitting department, which is not yet quite finished, and first of all were shown some lovely things in the way of tea-gowns, tea-jackets, and all things requisite for a thoroughly well-appointed *trousseau*. One graceful tea-gown of a new kind of silk *crépon*, blue-green in colour, made in the Empire style, with soft lace falling from the square yoke, and broad ribbons tying in front, was most fascinating, and very inexpensive too at three guineas; while they have some wonderfully cheap and pretty *crépons* in all colours trimmed with ribbons at the low price of 27s. These are really good too, and look worth double that amount. Here, also, we saw a very dainty pale-blue surah tea-jacket, with quantities of cream lace upon it, which would make any woman long to possess that most luxurious garment. Silk

*Jingerie* is decidedly a *spécialité* of this place, for they showed us some of the most exquisite soft silk *robes de nuit* imaginable, trimmed with Valenciennes lace and ribbon, while their hand-made, frilled, French cambric and lawn under-garments were extremely pretty and wonderfully inexpensive, and a cream silk under-skirt, with wide insertion and flouncings of lace, was quite the nicest thing of its kind that could be seen. Blouses and shirts are more worn than ever, so we examined an enormous stock of these, from the pretty cool-looking holland and linen so much worn just now, to the daintiest and most elaborate evening ones of silk and lace, all of the newest make. To wear with these, they showed us some very well cut and remarkably inexpensive serge skirts and coats, and for those who like to look "tailor made" there are some smart double-breasted waistcoats. One of these, in a Newmarket check cloth with pearl buttons, struck us as being particularly trim-looking, and for other occasions the soft accordion pleated fronts (especially those in cream surah), made with a large bow and lace ends in front, were extremely dainty and fresh. In this same room too we noticed an entirely new style of "Studio" or housekeeping aprons. These are of spotted, striped or plain linen, and come well over the dress. With the pretty square yoke and deep-pointed belt, they make not merely a useful, but a very ornamental addition to any morning dress.

Next we passed on to the children's things, which are really brought as near perfection as possible, more particularly the white embroidered cashmere frocks and pelisses made in the loose smock style, that prettiest of all fashions for the little ones. The Dutch bonnets of cream silk are quite a new idea, and also the pretty, quaint, three-cornered white felt hats, just the thing for a small page at a wedding or a boy just out of baby's clothes.

Then we went on to the millinery department and saw a variety of hats and bonnets ready trimmed, and multitudes of shapes which an obliging milliner will undertake to turn out for you in any way you fancy at the lowest possible price and in the shortest possible time. Some jet *toques* here are very *chic*, and can be worn instead of a bonnet (which does not suit all faces), on those occasions when the latter head-covering is *de rigueur*. There is a new sort of pale yellow straw, which is extremely pretty and is very much used at present. You can get it here in

any shape, and it is very cool and fresh looking, and just the thing for hot weather. The new sunshades we were very much pleased with. Those of black moiré and satin, with a wide appliqué of rose-point guipure round the edge, are perhaps the nicest; but there are some extremely pretty parasols also, lined with a colour and with black insertion let in all round. As we left this room we found our way into the conservatory, which is truly delightful. It is large and lofty, with a frieze running round the top of beautifully painted wild flowers. In the middle there is a fountain playing, surrounded with water lilies, and tall palms and tropical plants of all kinds are grouped around, while at one end is a perfect wealth of cut flowers. Roses, lilac, mignonette and lilies make the air quite heavy with their fragrance, and everywhere about are growing plants and shrubs. Among these little tables are placed, where tea is served, and directly out of this, a corridor leads to the restaurant, a lofty hall, supported by marble pillars, with a tessellated floor on which Indian rugs are strewn. Here you are quickly and promptly served by girls dressed in pale willow-green Liberty dresses and large frilled aprons. There is a waiting-room opening out of this, fitted up in Oriental style, with an Indian matting dado on pale-green walls, and every facility is at hand for writing letters and sending off telegrams, while all the daily and weekly papers lying about prevent your finding any waiting time dull or wearisome.

Harrod's is really a wonderful place. They are so thoroughly up-to-date in every department, and there is nothing you cannot find here, and all of the best and newest description, from household necessities of all kinds to clothes. Certainly, it is very easy to create wants, simply by looking at all the pretty things, and noting the new ideas everywhere displayed, for surely never were the shops so fascinating as they are just now. For this is the season when all the world is at its brightest and its best, and we also feel the absolute necessity of being in harmony with the gay surroundings, and "turning ourselves out" to the best of our ability. As far as clothes are concerned, this generally means a thorough renovation, and every chance of doing this is given us, merely by gazing in at the various shop windows, and discovering what is most likely to suit us amongst all the tempting things therein to be seen.